RHODA.

A NOVEL.

VOL. I.

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RHODA.

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THINGS BY THEIR RIGHT NAMES,"

AND "PLAIN SENSE."

"I teach the useful science to be good." *Pope.*

"Pour réussir par les ouvrages d'imagination, il faut peut-être, présenter une morale facile au milieu des mœurs sévères; mais au milieu des mœurs corrumpues le tableau d'une morale austère est le seul qu'il faille constamment offrir."

Staël, de la Litterature.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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RHODA.

CHAP. I.

————"You have often
Begun to tell me what I am, but stopt,
And left me to the bootless inquisition;
Concluding, Stay, not yet!"
————"The hour's now come,
This very minute bids thee ope thine ear;
Obey, and be attentive."—

Shakespeare.

"Stir the fire, Rhoda, and then"—

"There!—who could have done it better? And now, my dear Rhoda, for the tale of other times."

"Once upon a time," said the old gentleman, fixing his eyes upon his youthful companion, with an expression of mingled affection and pity—"Once upon a time, there was a certain young man and a certain young woman, who loved

one a[illegible] so well, that they forgot that [illegible] was any body else in the [illegible]—they forgot too that any body else could ever come into the world.—So they married; and never recovered their recollection, until the young man, on the close of a hard fought day, was brought back to a miserable hut, mortally wounded, and the young woman, having received his last sigh, breathed her's also, at the moment when she gave being to a female infant."

"Dearest uncle!"—said Rhoda.

"Now," continued the narrator, without seeming to attend to the interrupting exclamation, — "at this death-scene there were present only two persons—a wounded soldier and his wife; and the forgetfulness, which proved so disastrous to the young couple, seemed to extend itself to all who had ever heard their names. The young man was mentioned, for the last time, in the returns of the killed, and the young woman was thought of no more.

" But although no sympathy for the dead had touched the hearts of their fellow mortals, the claims, which the poor infant preferred to their notice, were of too clamorous a nature to be wholly disregarded. It was necessary to still them one way or other. Unfortunately, perhaps, for the wailing sufferer, it did not occur to the woman, who had been herself a mother, to make one grave the resting place for the parents and the child. She rather thought of preserving this feeble spark of existence,—of snatching from the remorseless grasp of death this sole remaining morsel of his prey.—A confused feeling, composed of a sense of duty and interest, produced this design.

" Poor miserable !"—said she, and her heart was softened.—" The lady had some good cloaths—and there must be some little money," added she—and her resolution was taken.

" So she proceeded to dress the baby, and to possess herself of all on which

she could lay her hands, that had belonged to the parents.

"I wish I could tell you, my dear child," continued the old gentleman, "that the calculations either of humanity or selfishness, had been answered; but, in truth, they were both disappointed. No sooner was the novelty of compassion worn off, than the helpless infant became a burthen. No pleasure was found in relieving wants which increased those of the reliever; nor could strength, which was inadequate to personal necessity, willingly become a prop to the weakness of another.

"The property, which had been tempting in prospect, was found to be so evanescent in possession, as to vanish almost before it was enjoyed; and once gone it was remembered no more. Yet no purpose of any actual or violent means ot disburthening herself of what now proved so heavy a load, occurred to this half-humanized animal. Bad food, bad nursing, and scanty cloathing

would, however, probably have effected her wishes without any wound to her moral feelings, had it not occurred to her, that this troublesome infant might still be the means of indemnifying her for all the torment and fatigue which it had occasioned.

"Could she present it in tolerable health, and with some appearance of tolerable care, to the relations which she had reason to believe that it had in England, she might yet reap a rich harvest, as a recompence for all her labours.

"Of the few unperishable trifles which the parents had possessed, all, that could be bartered for the coarse gratifications and absolute necessaries of the soldier and his wife, were long since gone; and the hopes of being able to identify the child rested upon the contents of a small wooden box, in which were some papers;—and a cornelian heart, the latter of which the mother had worn round her neck, and which the woman,

in the first furor of her compassion, had tied around that of the infant, with an oath that it should never be untied.

"This oath she had kept, and she now saw with no little satisfaction, that engraved on this heart were the initials of both the father and the mother of the child, whose parentage it was of so much moment to her interest to establish."

Rhoda raised to her lips the cornelian heart which hung from her bosom; looked earnestly on the engraving; again kissed it—drew the low stool on which she was seated still nearer to the knees of her uncle, and with her whole soul in her countenance, fixed her eyes on his face, as if to anticipate, before he could give it utterance, all which he had to tell her.

He continued thus his narrative: "The wounded soldier was now to be sent home as incurable—his wife accompanied him, bringing with her the

little wretch, whom, although at present an additional grievance, she considered as a future fortune for them both.

"Of the young woman's family, from having once lived in the neighbourhood, she had a more distinct notion than of that of the young man—she therefore made her first attack in this quarter.

"On her importunate solicitations to be allowed to see the lady of the manor, she was shewn to the housekeeper's room, and presently afterwards, there appeared a female about five and thirty, gaudily but not handsomely dressed, who demanded in a careless and ungracious manner her business.

"The woman instantly saw that this could not be the grandmother, to whose feelings she had meant to appeal.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon—but, if you please, Madam, your ladyship cannot be the lady of the house."

"Cannot be the lady of the house, woman!—why not?"

"You are too young, Madam."

"The lady's brow unbent.—

"Young as I look, I *am* the lady of the house, good woman.—What do you want?"

"Perhaps, Madam, you be a second wife?"

"No matter what I am—if you have any justice business, Mr. Wentworth is not at home.—"

"Why, yes, Madam, it is justice business, to be sure.—This poor child," withdrawing the cloak which had hitherto concealed the unfortunate victim of indiscretion—"this poor child, please you, is Mr. Wentworth's grand-daughter."

"Jones," said the lady, retreating towards the door, "send this woman out of the house—she is an impostor.—Mr. Wentworth never had a grand-daughter."

"But he *had*," cried the woman vehemently—"I am no impostor!—Miss Wentworth, God bless her! she was as good a lady as the sun ever shone upon, was his daughter—she married the young captain that was killed:—this is her

child—I saw it born, and I'll prove it to the whole world."

"Well, don't speak so loud," said the lady: "come this way—I dare say that I can convince you that you are mistaken."

"I dare say you cannot," muttered the woman, as she followed this gentle reasoning being into a small parlour, which they had no sooner entered, than the door of it was closely shut, and the conference, whatever it was, conducted in tones so low, as to baffle all the quick ears and eager curiosity of the assiduously listening Jones.

"In about half an hour the convincer and the convinced returned to the housekeeper's room.

"Let this poor woman go into the kitchen, and give her something to eat, Jones," said the lady. "She is no impostor, but she has mistaken the person whom she meant to inquire about.—Rest and warm yourself, good woman, and then go about your business. By the direc-

tions which I have given you, I dare say that you will find the people whom you are in quest of.—And Jones, come with me; I want to speak with you."

"Whatever arguments Mrs. Wentworth had made use of towards silencing her unfortunate opponent, she had certainly found none of force to persuade her that the child which she held in her arms was not the grand-daughter of her husband, nor without such rights upon the property, as might much infringe upon the provision which was to arise from it, for the numerous family that she had herself brought him—nor had Mrs. Wentworth been able, by any means in her power, to dispossess this tenacious adherer to justice of the little box before mentioned, and which the soldier's wife regarded as the fruitful hen, from which she still looked for more golden eggs.

"Having, therefore, consumed her meal of broken victuals before the curious

Mrs. Jones was suffered to return into the lower regions, she once more bundled up the unfortunate object of her selfish care, and departed from the hospitable mansion of Mr. Wentworth.

"She departed, however, with no design to seek the family of the Wentworths in the north, whom she had been so confidently assured, by the lady that she had just left, was the family to which the infant belonged. Although she had failed in one part of her work, she knew that her bow had been truly drawn, and a short consultation with her husband determined them to try rather to seek out the relations of the father, than either to rest contented with the money that had already been extorted, or to attempt to tell her story to people who, she well knew, had no reason beyond that of general humanity to listen to it.

"These relations were known to her only by name, and it was not without some difficulty that she made out the part of

England, where it was probable that they would be found.

"The journey, from the spot where they now were, was long; but a disabled soldier with his wife and infant child, were a group, to the wants of which every English heart was responsive, unless where a design was discovered of transferring the child from its supposed parents, to those whom they asserted ought rather to support it."

CHAP. II.

"The stings of falsehood those shall try,
And hard unkindness' alter'd eye,
That mocks the tear it forced to flow;
Lo, poverty to fill the band,
That numbs the soul with icy hand,
And slow consuming age."

Gray.

"Some weeks after the application to Mr. Wentworth, the travelling trio arrived in a village, on the outskirts of which was placed the Hall House, the residence of the elder brother of the thoughtless and unfortunate young man, with the mention of whose indiscreet forgetfulness I began my story.

"This elder brother was more than twenty years his senior, and had succeeded to the family estate, before his brother had made his appearance in this

best of all possible worlds.—As Sir William was solicitous that the honourable and ancient family, from whence he was descended, should not be blotted from the Herald's Office, he married; and soon found, in thinking much of his own growing family, a sufficient excuse *to his own heart*, for thinking not at all of those of his brothers and sisters. There were no less than six of them, all equally ill-portioned, upon the provident principle of sacrificing every branch to the leading shoot.

"Such had been the custom of this patriot family from generation to generation; yet the tree was no stately tree!—It neither reared its head loftily, nor spread its protecting branches widely.—Something was wanting to the culture—perhaps the blessings of the poor—perhaps the blessings of heaven, which seeing that nothing was trusted to its care, might think it waste to bestow it.—Be this as it may, there was certainly, at the hall little appearance either of

content in the drawing-room, or of comfort in the offices: not that there was wanting a sufficiency of the necessaries of life, nor more than a sufficiency of its splendours. When a dinner *was* given, the honour and dignity of the family were well supported by the display of plate on the sideboard; the furniture, when uncovered, was of the richest tabinet, and the most expensive patterns; and Sir William and Lady Elizabeth received their guests with a magnificence and a decorum, that inspired some with awe, struck some with envy, and put most of them to sleep.

"But such galas occurred seldom. The resources of the family were barely sufficient to supply the eldest son with the means to maintain such an appearance in the world as might procure him a wealthy marriage, and at the same time enable the daughters to pursue a similar plan of aggrandizement, by occasional excursions to races, and water-drinking places.

"Beyond these two demands for money, Sir William and Lady Elizabeth had no conception of any use to which it could be put; for as they were the fondest of parents, the splendid establishment of their children in the world appeared to them the only purpose for which they had been called into existence. Their thoughts, their affections, never moved a step beyond themselves, unless occasionally to visit their children, whom they loved, if love it could be called, not as distinct beings, for their virtues or their talents, but as parts of their own persons, which, being likely to survive some little period, the other parts called for a somewhat more extended care to provide for them the good things of this world, than would otherwise have been wanted.

"There was, indeed, another person, who sometimes made one of their household, but certainly without any expenditure of their affections, and but little of their means—a worn-out veteran, a valetudinarian uncle, whose health had sunk

under the continued exercise of subaltern duties, for more than forty years together, without one happy opportunity by which he might have drawn on him the approving notice of the world, or a kind bullet that would have sent him out of it.

" He was now retired upon the little modicum which is allotted as the recompence for a life that has discharged only its duties ; and as a long abstinence from most of those gratifications, which some suppose to be necessary to happiness, had weaned him even from the wish for them, he came not to the habitation of his more opulent relation, in pursuit either of the dainties or the comforts that he might reasonably have expected to have found there. He came, indeed, in hopes to supply that single want which, through life, he had found to be insatiable, the want of something to love !

" He had gratified this want through many bitter years, at the expense of

heart-achs innumerable, and disappointments little honourable to human nature: yet was this desire unsubdued; and he felt that it would only expire with his latest breath.

"His last experiment had been unfortunate. The graces of Lady Elizabeth, and the apparent easiness of Sir William's temper, had seduced him into the belief that they were creatures who might become dear to his heart; but the experiment had deceived him. With all the moral alchymy of which he was master, he had never been able to extract one quality from the composition of either Sir William or Lady Elizabeth, capable of exciting his affections.

"No doubt the mine was not wholly without ore; but it was either in such small quantities as to escape his observation, or lay so deeply embedded in selfishness, as to elude his seizure. Still, however, he would not allow himself wholly to despair. If the cares of the world absorbed all the faculties, and all

the affections of the parents, he still promised himself that he should, in the children, find something to love.

"But the son was too insolent, and the daughters too vain, to admit the claims that age and poverty made to their attention; and they were all too heartless to be gratified by the tenderness of affection, when offered by one who had nothing else to give.

"Yet, not for all this, did their repulsed relation forbear to visit them. His ruling passion still prevailed over every feeling of disappointment and mortification; and although he was no longer the dupe of that self-love, which had so often misled him in his researches after that will-of-the-wisp, *mutual affection*, he still indulged the foible of his own heart, by loving—not, indeed, his brother men, nor sister women: these were too high game for his decrepid age to fly at, but the woods, the lawns, the streams of his former home. Nay, his affections could foster upon the dark corner of the nur-

sery in which he once had slept; the compass window of the hall, where he had knuckled his marble; or the butler's pantry, where, in days long passed, he had stored his most valued fishing tackle.

"These favourite haunts, so sacred to his imagination, were indeed almost the only spots in the whole mansion that the innovating hand of fashion had suffered to retain either the features or the names by which he had once known them.

"The "little closet," where he had first been taught the rudiments of all human science, was now Lady Elizabeth's "boudoir." The "big parlour" was become "the eating-room;" while "the study," with the help of a few adjoining cupboards and closets, made a tolerably respectable "library;" and the "long-gallery" was by no means unworthy of the Sphinxes and Ottomans, which informed every erudite eye that it was now the "drawing-room."

"I will not attempt to vindicate the taste which led the old gentleman to

prefer all that *had been* to all *that was*, and still less to justify the pertinacity with which he persisted, to the continued shock of Lady Elizabeth's refined sense of hearing, to call all around him by the appellations by which he had originally become acquainted with them. Yet it was a harmless peculiarity; an inoffensive renovation of youth to an old man, who had outlived all his actual pleasures, which might have been tolerated by good humour, or overlooked by good sense; but good nature and good sense made no part of the novelties with which the testy veteran was surrounded; and whatever of either was possessed by himself, seemed, on the occasions when they were most wanted, to be least at his command. Yet he lingered round the old hereditary spot, ashamed that he could neither conquer the partiality which led him thither, nor his own waywardness, which made him find fault with all that he saw there.

"With dispositions so little conciliatory,

on either side, was this family, one morning assembled in the "little parlour," at no very cheerful breakfast, when the footman informed his master that a woman desired to see him, on very important business.

"Oh pray see her instantly," said Lady Elizabeth; "I dare say she is the person whom we were told would inform——"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Sir William; "all the game I have on the manor is not worth the trouble I have with it."

"No other *gentleman* would think so," replied Lady Elizabeth, with an emphasis that did not tend to allay the irritation of Sir William's feelings.

"I beg the lady may be brought into this room," said the old uncle: "I should like to see the woman who comes to tell a story that will ruin her husband."

"You do not think of the justice of the case, my dear Sir," said Lady Elizabeth, with much solemnity.

"Justice, like charity, should begin at home, I think," replied the querulous old man.

"While this little sharp dialogue was passing, Sir William had given orders that the woman should be shewn into the room, and his orders were already obeyed.

"She looked not, however, like a person who came to abandon any of her family, —for she held a child in her arms, whose wailings she soothed with the kindest accents, and by her side stood a maimed and sallow soldier, who leaned on her bosom for support.

"Bless me! who are these?" cried Lady Elizabeth, with alarm.

"We be come, my lady," said the woman, "to make every body happy. We have brought you, Sir William, your niece."

"Niece!—I have no niece. That is, I have—I ——I ——I want no niece," stammered Sir William.

"Yes, yes, you have a niece," replied

the woman, " and as pretty a lass as can be seen on a summer's day," uncovering, at the same time, the face of the unfortunate infant.—" She's the Captain's daughter:—I saw her born, and now I have brought her to you."

" The Captain?—He was disobedient—undutiful—I renounce him."

" Nobody knows what sums he has cost my poor Sir William!" said Lady Elizabeth, with a deep sigh; " and now does he send his brat a begging."

" Lord love you, the Captain never sent her. Why, my lady, he's dead;—and so is the Captain's lady; but like they left this box, and what's in it will shew whose daughter this is. She's no brat, I can tell you!"

" Whoever she is," said Sir William, " I am not obliged to keep her. I have no doubt but that you are an impostor; and if you don't go about your business, I shall have you taken up for vagabonds."

" Vagabonds!—No, no, 'Squire, we are no vagabonds," said the man sur-

lily; "I have not served my king and country to be called vagabond; things aren't come to that pass: I shall have right done me, and so shall this poor baby too."

"Do you threaten, insolent?" said Sir William. "Turn them out of the house."

"And shew them to mine, if you please," said the old gentleman, who now believed that he had found something to love.—"Or stay; let me see your trinkets. Sir William, be not alarmed: if this child be your niece, she is mine also, and in that case I will take care of her."

"*You?*" said Lady Elizabeth, in a tone of voice that reproached the old gentleman at once with his folly and his poverty.

"Ah! God bless your honour," said the woman, "you look like an honest gentleman. Yes, yes, the box will tell whose child she is—but trinkets! I don't know what trinkets are; but

there's not the value of a brass farthing in the box, except what the papers say. If you'll believe me, the poor Captain and his lady did not leave enough behind them to bury them."

"I have some reasons to believe," said Sir William, "that they were never married."

"Slanderer!" said the old gentleman, vehemently, who at that moment had his eyes fixed on the paper which ascertained the marriage; "did you not admit the marriage only three days ago, and tell me at the same time that there was no offspring?"

"I believed then that there was none," replied Sir William; "and it is not proved now."

"Look at this!" cried the woman, triumphantly, and held up the cornelian heart; "look at this: who did this belong to?"

"And we have a thousand other proofs," said the soldier. "Besides that, I will take my oath of it; and it would

be hard if a soldier could not be believed on his oath."

"I do, I do believe you," said the old gentleman.---"Come home with me, and I will reward you in the best manner I am able, for the care that you have taken of my niece: she shall henceforth be my daughter."

"Oh my dear father!" cried Rhoda, embracing the knees of her uncle; "but you were not the testy old gentleman? You were not the querulous veteran?"

"Yes, my child, I was. The sources of benevolence seemed to be dried up in me; you opened them afresh; and hence you see no resemblance between the peevish humourist, who would never call things and places by the names that their proprietors had given them, and the indulgent simpleton, who lets you do and say whatever you please."

CHAP. III.

> "This small domestic foe,
> Still sharp, and pointed, to the breast did grow."
>
> *Crabbe.*

"WELL," resumed the old gentleman, "having made this valued acquisition of, 'a thing to love,'—I cultivated it with all the best of my ability; but though I succeeded completely in generating the warmest affection in my own breast, I found that I had not attained the end for which I had nourished it.—It did not make my happiness—I had still an unsatisfied want—perhaps it was only the natural increase of desire, which 'grew with what it fed on;'—but now, I must forsooth be loved in return."

"And you were, my dearest uncle; you were;" interrupted Rhoda vehemently.

"I believe it, dearest!"—replied her uncle gently—"but your love was not

composed wholly of the same materials as mine. Alas! you had scarcely passed your first infancy before I found that the affection, which I had, as it were, created, and which I had stimulated with the most eager solicitude, made the chief torment of my life."

"Oh heavens!"—said Rhoda—

"Be not hurt, my love," said her uncle, —"no deficiency in any of your qualities occasioned this misery—it sprung from myself, from a fervent heart united with a weak head—I never could calculate, never draw a consequence in my life—but the result and the consequence will come, whether we seek them or not.

"I now began to find all that Lady Elizabeth's emphatic *you* might have told me before, that any shelter which I could afford you must end with my life: that every year, which added to your want of protection, took something from my means of affording it; and that the seven years, which had passed away so swiftly in the delight of administer-

ing to your wishes and your wants, had conducted me to that period of existence, beyond which it is presumptuous to look for its continuance.—The evil which I dreaded seemed to be as irresistible as it was certainly impending: it haunted my imagination night and day.—Your growing charms, for you were charming in my eyes, served but to aggravate my apprehensions—I was wretched, and I was helpless!

"Some events had taken place at Strictland Hall, which I thought were calculated to soften and expand the hearts of the inhabitants.—Death had thinned the ranks of the family, and fortune had smiled upon the individuals that remained. The son had formed a lucrative and splendid marriage, the surviving daughter had been portioned by a godmother, and Lady Elizabeth and Sir William might be supposed to be at leisure to feel that there were other beings in the world, than those to whom they had given birth.

"I thought that I perceived, in my occasional visits, a lessened inclination to sacrifice comfort to splendor, and the rights of others to the demands of self.

"I told you that I could not calculate,—but I could castle-build, and my foundations were generally proverbially unsubstantial.

"Upon the slight grounds which I have mentioned, I erected a moral fabric of compassion, — generosity,—affection!—and I constituted you the queen and mistress of the mansion!

"I had settled the matter so often with myself, that I forgot it was to be settled with any body else.—The objections which I did not discover, I was not aware could exist; and what would have been a happiness to myself to have done, I believed must be so to others.

"One morning, when I was seated by the side of Lady Elizabeth, on the celestial blue sopha, in her ladyship's boudoir, (for the happiness, which you had imparted to my heart, had taught

me not to quarrel for names,) breathing all the sweets of nature and of art from the *pot-pourris* and exotics which surrounded me; and listening to a flow of sentiment that seemed to lull every angry particle in the human mind to peace: now, thought I, is the moment to speak of Rhoda—but I spoke first of the new daughter-in-law, whose virtues and whose graces had been the theme, which had called forth so copious a stream of eloquence from the lips of Lady Elizabeth.

"You are fortunate indeed, Madam," said I, "to have found united so many gifts of mind and person, with a fortune which made it equally prudent and desirable that the lady should become your son's wife, and I sincerely congratulate you and Sir William."

"Oh, name not fortune!"—cried the lady.—"Before I was acquainted with my Wilhelmina, my duty to my family might have forced such considerations upon me; but had I known her poor and

pennyless I must have wished her to be my daughter—be assured, my dear Sir, she is a treasure in herself."

"Nay, Madam, you know that I am not one of those who think that laying house to house, and field to field, has much to do with the happiness of life: yet some of the fruits of the one, and some kind of shelter in the other, is necessary in this mortal state; and I begin to fear that, in Rhoda's case, I have not properly considered *how much.*"

"It was not for me to blame you, my dear Sir,"—replied the gentle Lady Elizabeth, "and your motive was so amiable! —otherwise I must confess, I did think from the first, that if we had made a little subscription, to have put the poor child into some way of getting her own bread—"

"Getting her bread!"—said I, starting—"the daughter of Sir William's brother—the grand-daughter of my father, get her bread!"

"Ah, my dear Sir, it is fine talking; but

we mortals, as you have just said, must eat; and we cannot eat without money: and where will Rhoda have money except she gets it? Is there any disgrace in honest industry?—Surely no body in this enlightened age can think that there is."

"Rhoda, I was shocked!—I spurned from me the painted velvet footstool on which my gouty foot was resting;—I sprung from the elastic luxury on which I was reposing, with all the alacrity of seventy years, and having overturned half a dozen china jars, in my haste to escape from this modern Circe—I hobbled away to my little straw-roofed hut, and folding you in my arms, I swore that I would never again enter Strictland Hall, nor converse with Lady Elizabeth.

"My determination was probably by no means disagreeable to her ladyship, for after some faint efforts, on the part of Sir William, to make me relent, with some mawkish lamentations, "that such near connexions, each side meaning so

well, could not agree," he ceased to importune, and indeed to visit me.

"This event happened more than ten years ago, and may account to you for what you have often wondered at, that we never saw our relations of the Hall, unless at church.

"My start of indignation, or even the just resentment, which the *suave* Lady Elizabeth had awakened in my bosom, had not, however, at all lessened the necessity of providing against the probability of your literally fulfilling the curse entailed on the posterity of Adam. It is true that there were times, when in the honesty of my heart, and the warmth of my imagination, I grew half in love with the dignity of standing behind a counter of one's own, rather than eating at another man's table; and that I revelled in the delights of pricking the fingers to the bone in the duties of *honest industry*, in preference to preserving them in the rosy softness, that might entitle them to the honour of forming wreaths for "*a kind benefactress.*"

"Yet my pride, or my prejudice, or that unaccountable part of our nature which so strongly prefers dependance upon the efforts of others, to the labouring for ourselves, always brought me back to *the feelings of a gentleman;* and I concluded all my reasonings with this high-toned and rational sentiment, "that the grand-daughter of Sir Thomas Strictland should never maintain herself."

The feeling, which had produced this determination in the old gentleman, was artificial pride. The natural pride of Rhoda spoke a different language: her heart swelled---tears were in her eyes.

"Oh my uncle," she cried; "would you have me a dependant being?"

"We are all dependant beings, child," returned her uncle: "the difference lies only in the nature of our dependance. The support, which I sought for you, was the natural support due from the stronger branches of the family tree to the weaker; but I sought in vain. An application, that I made to your relations on the maternal side, was equally unsuc-

cessful with that to Lady Elizabeth. The Wentworths were as obdurate as the Strictlands; and I was told the former worthies had authentic proofs that you had never been born."

"Oh!" said Rhoda, "how I do hate those people!"

"Hate, Rhoda?"

"My dear uncle, you would not have me love them?"

"Why not?—They are your enemies, and are you not to love your enemies? It is an express command—there is none for loving your friends."

"Ah! there is no need," said Rhoda, throwing her arms around her uncle.

"Nor, I fear," he returned, "will there with you be many calls for such love. The heart, to which I now hold you, is the single heart which sinks with a fear, or throbs with a hope, of which you are the object."

"Not *quite* the single one, my uncle. The vicar—my dear Frances."

And Rhoda thought of another ex-

ception, but she did not name it; and why she did not, I do not feel myself obliged to explain.

"Poor innocent!" said her uncle, and kissed her forehead.—"Thou hast yet to learn how rare a thing is a friend. But we have wandered from our point. All that I have told you, and more than I have told you, will be found in manuscript in my desk. The narrative has been prepared; for death often cometh as a thief in the night; but it has always been my intention, if my life were spared to the period when I should consider you as sufficiently matured reasonably to weigh all circumstances, to tell you the story myself. I have seen, for some time past, that your wish to know your family history has been ardent. The forbearance that you have manifested, in not pressing this wish, gives me a proof of your discretion, and has encouraged me to take you into my full confidence. You are now acquainted with the most prominent parts of the story. Nothing

remains more for me than to give you, to the best of my abilities, a map of that country, in which you are about to sojourn, an inexperienced stranger, without a guide, and without a protector!

"I have, it is true, been myself so long withdrawn from it, that I might doubt my being able to sketch the faintest line of resemblance between what I once knew it, and what it must now be. But if fashion varies, human nature remains the same; and it is with human nature that you will have to deal.

"In this, at present unknown world, then, you will find much to admire, little to love, and less to imitate. One thing you will *not* find---*Truth!* or you will find it sacrificed to every contemptible pretension, to every petty vanity. Nor will you often find broad, confident, *honest* falsehood. Your intercourse with your fellow mortals must be carried on in a low, huckstering jargon, which tricks out its paltry wares in false colours, with just so much sterling gold

as will preserve you from the disgrace of falsehood, without giving you a right to the honours of truth."

"Stop, stop, my uncle," said Rhoda. "I will never enter this bad world! I will die rather."

"No, you will *not*," returned he.— "And moreover, you will like this bad world—you will love it—more or less, indeed, according to the share which you may have in its toys and trinkets; but you will love it for itself, for years to come, let it treat you as it will; and therefore, Rhoda, let us consider how we may best set you forward in it.

"You have heard how magnanimously I reasoned on the gentle hint which I received from Lady Elizabeth, and how courageously I vowed. My vow has been as the waters of Noah; nor have I ever wished to recal it; but I have sometimes doubted whether the magnanimity of my reasonings might not, without any sacrifice of *proper pride*, have been tempered with somewhat more of foresight;

While I doubted, however, time passed on, and with it were those habits confirmed, and that mind formed, by which you are now rendered totally improper to provide for yourself. The accomplishments, as they are called, so sought from the daughter of the duchess to the daughter of the artisan, I have been too poor to give you even the rudiments of; you cannot teach what you do not know; but what you have wanted in instruction I have made up to you in indulgence; and you have been so carefully attended, and your wishes so assiduously prevented, that while I shall leave you without the means of commanding almost the necessaries of life, I have rendered you insufficient to yourself."

"My uncle, my uncle!" impatiently broke in Rhoda; "you shall not thus calumniate yourself—you shall not thus undervalue me. The accomplishments, indeed, I give to the wind, and give them without a sigh; but I am not useless—

I am not helpless—I am not insufficient to myself."

"Oh yes, I know that you can fly over hill and dale after every butterfly that starts up before you, or can dance unweariedly to the strains of the blind fiddler for hours together—you can do all *with* your will; *without* it *nothing*; and when I cease to breathe, and soon I must cease to breathe, that *will* must no longer be the motive for a single action of your life."

"Not so," said Rhoda; "for I will *chuse* all that I *must* do."

"That will be indeed philosophy!" replied her uncle. — "Well, it is thus that you must do. With the few hundred pounds that all I am worth will procure, you must take up your abode with Mrs. Strictland, that rich and inestimable daughter-in-law, whose perfections had called forth the stream of sentimental eloquence, which once betrayed me into the error of be-

lieving Lady Elizabeth had a heart; that daughter-in-law, who has civilly hated her husband's mother from the first moment that she knew her, and who thinks herself a pattern of filial piety, because she condescends to pass one fortnight in every twelve months with "the worthy old people at the hall." Your cousin, Mr. Strictland, though cold and taciturn, I take not to be quite so much of an automaton as his more bland and garrulous wife: he has played with you—he has pitied you; and he has promised me, that whenever I die, he will receive you into his family."

Rhoda's head sunk on the knee of her uncle.

"Oh, my uncle! Would that we might die together!" said she.

"And is this a specimen of your promised philosophy?" said he. "No, child, I must die—you must live; it is the law of nature: I have told you so from the first hour that you could annex an idea to the words."

"You have, indeed," replied Rhoda, mournfully, "made the sad image so familiar to my mind, that although I know it threatens me with all that I most fear and hate, yet I can contemplate it with a steady eye, and speak of it with a firm voice; but, my uncle, this grievous hour is not near. I will not believe that it is; I am sure that you look younger than Sir William: many, many years will you be spared to me; and let me, from this evening, even from this very *now*, begin to learn to do every thing that you call useful. Frances, I am sure, will teach me; and although I sometimes laugh at her housewifery and bustles, I will try to be as bustling, and as housewifely as herself."

The old gentleman faintly smiled, pressed Rhoda to his heart, and said, "Call for supper, Rhoda; I shall be glad to go to bed."

The meal passed cheerfully; for Rhoda, accustomed to such prognostics from her uncle, retained not beyond the mo-

ment of his making them, the sadness that they were so well fitted to impress; and that future, which she vainly promised both to herself and him, she so coloured with hope, or shaded by uncertainty, as to take from it all distinct apprehensions of evil.

The fresh looks and gay spirits, with which the old man greeted his niece at breakfast the next morning, served still more to banish all reflection from her mind. She frolicked around him, fondled, and laughed by turns; amused herself and her uncle, and equally forgot her resolution of learning to be useful, and the necessity for being so.

Thus passed the day.

"Now, my dear uncle," said she, "you must take your afternoon's nap, and I must run to the vicarage, and shew Frances my roses, before they are withered. I hope I shan't find her too busy to look at them."

CHAP. IV.

"In aught that tries the heart,
How few can stand the proof!"

Byron.

The vicarage was distant from the cottage not a quarter of a mile, and Rhoda was lucky enough to find the whole of its inhabitants assembled in its little parlour, at the hour of vacant enjoyment.

These consisted of the vicar himself, a grave, and rather austere looking personage, with the lines of strong sense marked in his countenance, a young man of about one and twenty, who was his pupil, and the gentle and intelligent Frances.

"What have you been doing," said Rhoda to the latter, "that we have not seen you these two days?"

"Frances has been engaged in the duties of life," replied the vicar.

"Oh, these tiresome duties of life!" exclaimed Rhoda.

"But you have brought us its pleasures," said Frances, taking a rose from the hair of Rhoda.

The young man looked up from his book, surveyed Rhoda for a moment, and again recurred to his book.

"Now if that book is not poetry," said Rhoda, "and that poetry in praise of roses, I will never forgive you."

The young man smiled, and shut the book.

"I deserve the reproach," said he.

"Miss Strictland," said the vicar, "is resolved that nobody, where she is, shall be incommoded with the tiresome duties of life."

"Oh my dear sententious friend," replied Rhoda, "you are quite mistaken, I assure you. I am come to learn all my duties from Frances. Do you know

I intend that you shall teach me to be useful? How must I begin?"

" By pouring out the tea," said Frances, " while I speak to that woman who is just gone into the house."

" Frances will keep ' the odds of knowledge' to herself, I perceive," said Rhoda.---" With all my heart: wrinkles will keep off the longer."

" Wrinkles!" said the young man, eyeing Rhoda with a look which said, ' can that face ever be wrinkled?'

" Yes," said the vicar, " wrinkles, Mr. Ponsonby. --- Miss Strictland, I hope, will live to be wrinkled."

" I do hope that I never shall," said Rhoda.---" Why, my dear Sir, what is there in life worth having, at the expense of wrinkles?"

" The consciousness of having passed a succession of years, in a succession of duties," said the vicar.

" Well, Sir," said Rhoda, " this is all very well in the pulpit; but now, with

all these sweets breathing around us, with all the notes of that delightful blackbird sounding in our ears, really I think we may be allowed to think of the pleasures of life, as well as its duties."

"They are inseparable," said the incorrigible vicar.

Frances returned at this moment with a countenance so replete with the expression of delighted benevolence, as made the best comment on her father's text, and which, if Rhoda had understood it, might have reconciled her to his doctrines.

Frances said a few words in a low voice to Mr. Wyburg, who gave her a nod of approbation, and looked on her with a smile, which banished, for the instant, all severity from his features.

"My dear Sir," said Rhoda, "if you did but know how smiles become you, you would never look so grave again, as you did at me just now."

"My dear Miss Strictland," replied Mr. Wyburg, "my looks are the index

to my heart. When I look grave, I disapprove."

"Oh, I deserved that," said Rhoda, shrugging up her shoulders; "but what have I done to-day, my dear Sir? You have not scolded me *so* a great while."

"You have been making use of God's blessings to counteract his will," said the vicar.

"Oh, my father!" said Frances.

"I am no logician," said Rhoda, carelessly---"I can see no connection between the premises and the conclusion."

Mr. Ponsonby looked as if he saw none either; and Frances, to give the conversation another turn, asked him to read to Miss Strictland the little poem which he had read to her and her father the day before.

Mr. Ponsonby readily complied. It was a good-natured ridicule on some of the popular follies of the day, and occasioned so much mirth in his auditors, as soon to restore perfect self-complacency to all.

"Good night, my dear Sir," said Rhoda, shaking hands with her rigid monitor; "I am faulty, but I am not incorrigible. I'am just going to turn over a new leaf, in more respects than one; and who, so well as you, can direct me to the most instructive page? If you would be kind enough to teach, I think that even I could learn."

"My dear Miss Strictland," said the old gentleman, fervently, "the difficulty does not lie in your want of ability to learn: yours are no common gifts; a warning or an example you must be. This option involves tremendous consequences.—Farewell!"

"That good father of yours takes a delight in frightening me," said Rhoda to Frances.

"I never saw Mr. Wyburg so severe before," said Mr. Ponsonby.—"I wonder how he can find in his heart to say such things."

"Oh," cried Rhoda, "I have been

naughty two or three times lately, and he forbore me; but I suppose that he remembers it, and makes one punishment do for all."

"Naughty!" said Mr. Ponsonby; "how can that be?"

"Nothing is impossible," said Frances, with a smile; "but, my dear Rhoda, *if any thing is wrong*, let us talk less of it, and think more."

"Well, if I am not perfect, it must be my own fault," said Rhoda; "for nobody has so many stimulations to be good—the never fault-finding indulgences of my dear uncle—the sharp correction of Mr. Wyburg—the affectionate sincerity of my friend here, all shew me what I ought to be, and furnish motives for being what I ought."

"You *are* all that you ought to be," said Mr. Ponsonby.—"You are *perfect*."

"Oh, keep in that, faith," said Rhoda, laughing, "and so good night:" and then shaking hands with Frances,

she hastened home, to gladden the eyes, and delight the heart of her doating uncle.

But she returned in vain — those eyes were closed never more to open !--- and that heart was still, never more to beat !---The connecting link between the mortal and immortal parts had suddenly snapt: the body was prostrate on the earth, and the spirit had returned to Him who gave it !

Where now was Rhoda's philosophy? where was her resignation?— Alas ! this was not the moment when she could be expected to exist either.

The blow struck her to the ground, and for some little time, she escaped by the violence of the stroke from the sense of the injury that it inflicted—but this pause from sorrow could be of no long duration.

" I must die—you must live ;"—had been some of the last words that had sounded from that voice which she must hear no more, and the officious kindness of her friend soon recalled her to the

comprehension of the extent of misfortune that these words comprised.

"He is gone!—he has left me!—and who in this wide world now cares for Rhoda?"

"Do not I care for you?"—said the affectionate Frances, in a voice of the tenderest compassion.—"Can *He*, who caters for the sparrow, forget you?"—said Mr. Wyburg.

"He was my all!"—cried Rhoda, clasping her arms round the lifeless body of her uncle—"he told me so himself, and he never uttered falsehood."

"Then let his words controul your will," said Mr. Wyburg,—"thus speaks he from the dead:—

"Rhoda, I have prepared an asylum for you: let not your impatience render my cares vain."

"True, true!"—said the agonized Rhoda, "so he would speak!—but—— oh he can speak no more!—undone for ever—miserable Rhoda!—would we had died together!"

"Frances"—said Mr. Wyburg—

"compose your friend; and let her be conveyed as soon as possible to the vicarage."

But this was no easy task — Rhoda could listen to no comfort, could practice no resignation.

"I would not be comforted—I would no be consoled—Oh my uncle, how ungrateful have I been!—how wayward—oh, could I call back time, how docile, how submissive would I be!"

"Be docile, be submissive now"—said Frances—"a higher will, than even that of your kind benefactor, calls upon you for submission."

"I do, I do submit"—said the poor sufferer—"but leave me, Frances—leave me. This spot is the whole of space that is allotted me: here all my duties, all my affections centre."

"Let me intreat—" said Frances. "There is a dumb eloquence here," said Rhoda, throwing herself on the lifeless body, "that makes all your pleadings vain—nothing but the grave shall divide this beloved object from me!"

"My dearest Rhoda," said Frances, intercedingly.

"Frances," returned she, "leave me. You see that I am calm—I do not weep; but I am fixed—immoveable—here will I remain until *all* is gone; then do with me as you will; for then existence will be passed from me!"

Frances, grieved and shocked, knew not what to reply. Resistance, at this moment, she saw, would be in vain; and doubting her own powers how best to mollify the exasperated feelings of her friend, she withdrew gently, and sought the counsel of her father.

"And is it thus the child receives the chastisement of the parent? Does the creature thus receive the fiat of its Creator?" said Mr. Wyburg; "but she is new to grief, and was never trained to patience. We must give way—better dispositions will, I hope, await a calmer hour."

Mr. Wyburg then agreed with Frances that she should remain at the cottage to watch over her friend, and to be at hand

to seize every favourable moment when the voice of reason and religion might be heard with advantage, while he proceeded to give such orders, and to take such steps, as the present circumstances required.

But vain were the hopes entertained by the friends of Rhoda, that the paroxysm of self-indulgence would be short. She remained insensible to the attentions of friendship, and deaf to the expostulations of good sense. Absorbed in her own feelings, she thought not of others; and while she remained immovably fixed by the side of the bed, on which the dead body of her uncle was placed, without sleep, and nearly without food, she regarded not the apprehensions of her friends—that her constitution must sink under such deprivations and exertions; nor would she give the poor return for all their kindness, of showing that it was acceptable to her.

"It is my duty to remain here," said she.—"And if I *do* die in consequence, who will there be left to lament me?"

The streaming eye of Frances, the air of agony with which she averted her face from the cold enquiring eye with which these words were accompanied, might most touchingly have answered the question, had Rhoda been at liberty to have attended to any feelings but her own.

But Rhoda saw alone the lifeless object before her. She heard but the voice of her own undisciplined affliction.

" Poor mortal !" said Mr. Wyburg.— " How ill art thou suited to the world of discipline on which thou art about to enter !"

At length the grave closed over the poor remains of all that Rhoda believed that the world contained for her, and she suffered herself to be led away in silence and despair to the hospitable vicarage, where every alleviation and every sympathy that foresight and affection could provide, awaited her.

CHAP. V.

> "For her words, they rob the Hybla bees,
> And leave them honeyless."
>
> *Shakspeare.*

It was not only from the offices of real friendship, that Rhoda might have found that she was not quite a solitary being upon earth.

Mr. Wyburg had made an immediate communication of the melancholy event which had taken place at the cottage, to its relative inhabitants at "the Hall." The following note was in consequence sent from Lady Elizabeth to Miss Wyburg:—

"My dear Miss Wyburg,

"My poor shattered nerves were too much discomposed by the shocking in-

telligence which your worthy father conveyed to Sir William last night, to allow of my testifying the sincere share which I take in the family loss.

"Our friend that is gone was a most excellent creature. No doubt he had his oddities. Who has not? but I am sure that we shall none of us think of them any more; and, for my own part, I freely forgive all the misrepresentation (I should be loth to call it by a harsher name), of which I have been so long the object. I understand that he has done nobly for poor Rhoda—given her all! To be sure it was to be expected; and at the same time secured her a residence with Mr. Strictland; which shews that the old gentleman was not quite so ignorant in the science of foresight as he would sometimes have persuaded us; but I do not blame him for such attention to the interests of Rhoda, when he had once taken up the whim of bringing her up as a lady—a very foolish step, certainly; but she was not to blame; and I

am pleased to think that she will not suffer by so unaccountable a fancy, and that she will want for nothing.

" I do not presume to offer my advice, as no doubt but that Mr. Wyburg will take no step without the direction of Mr. and Mrs. Strictland; but my dear Miss Wyburg will, I know, pardon me, if I hint, that until their pleasure is known, it would perhaps be best that nothing beyond mere decencies should be thought of with respect to dress.

" Mrs. Strictland has the best taste of any body whom I know; and if she should order Rhoda to town, to join her immediately, I am sure that she would not like to have her come loaded with things, which it would be impossible that she should ever wear; and if she determine not to receive her at present, scarcely any thing will be necessary, and every thing ought to be done at the least expense. I shall most readily, I am sure, contribute all in my power that it should be so, and shall therefore send my own

maid, when it may be convenient to you to see her, to execute any little orders that Rhoda may chuse to give; and I may as well just mention, that as I have had some new patterns from town not long ago, Rhoda need not be afraid of being made a fright; and there is no reason, because the materials are not very fine, that the form should not be good. Indeed, I have so simple a taste, that I always prefer fashion to finery.

"Pray give my love to Rhoda. All reason for estrangement is now passed. I will call upon her very soon, and Sir William joins me in the hope, that Mrs. Strictland's summons will not be so urgent as to make it impossible for Rhoda to pass one day, at least, at the Hall.

"Sir William desires to unite with me in best compliments to yourself and Mr. Wyburg; and I am, my dear Miss Wyburg,

"Very sincerely yours,

"E. S."

Miss Wyburg could decypher the po-

lite language of Lady Elizabeth too truly, to see any thing in this note that could contribute to the alleviation of Rhoda's sorrows. She therefore contented herself with merely informing her friend, that Lady Elizabeth took an interest in her present circumstances, and that she would soon visit her.

"Lady Elizabeth!" said Rhoda.—"I do not know Lady Elizabeth."

But it was now necessary that she should know her. The funeral being over, and Rhoda established at the vicarage, Lady Elizabeth considered the moment to be arrived, beyond which she could not defer her visit to her niece.

Rhoda, however, continued still absorbed in grief. She seemed not to see, or hear those around her; or if compelled to attention, the expression of her countenance was only changed from wretchedness to displeasure.

"My dear Rhoda," said Frances, "Lady Elizabeth informs me that she will call upon you this evening."

"I shall not see Lady Elizabeth," said Rhoda.

"My dear Miss Strictland," said Mr. Wyburg, "you must see her."

"Must!" repeated Rhoda, bursting into an agony of tears.—"Oh, I knew that I had lost my *all!*"

"Miss Strictland," said Mr. Ponsonby, "cannot be expected to see Lady Elizabeth yet; and surely it ought always to be at her option."

Rhoda looked on Mr. Ponsonby with a complacency which her features had not before assumed; then, overcome by the recollections, she burst again into tears, and sobbed aloud.

Frances pressed her in her arms, and Mr. Ponsonby hung over her chair in agony.

"I see," said Mr. Wyburg, taking his seat by Rhoda, "that you regard me as unkind; and the inconsiderate indulgence of your younger friends will no doubt tend to confirm you in this unjust opinion; but the word, which seemed so

harsh to your ears, was not used in any sense which ought to offend you. Be assured that it was not designed as the tone of authority or controul. If I said that you must see Lady Elizabeth, I spoke the word only as addressed to a rational being, who must be guided by the dictates of reason, or forego all claims to that distinction. Can you pretend thus to lament him whose aim in life was but to promote your happiness, and yet wilfully throw away all the means by which you might be happy? Is it thus you fulfil his wishes? Is it thus you do honour to his tutorship? Will the irrational, the passion-governed pupil, reflect dignity on the preceptor? In the regions of peace and charity, will it add to his happiness to see you the slave to a resentment which his spiritual nature now regards as the dross of his earthly part? Will ——"

"Enough, enough," said Rhoda; "I will see Lady Elizabeth. I will be rational; I will do honour to the hand that

trained me. Happy I can never be again, but I will shew that I know how to endure misery. Let her come; but let her not presume to name the man whom she never learnt to reverence."

Mr. Wyburg sighed; but he quenched not the smoking flax.

Lady Elizabeth was admitted, and Rhoda thought herself a heroine, because she received her with the common forms of civility; but she was cold, distant, almost haughty, grave, and uncommunicative, betraying no symptom of grief, as if fearful to awaken a sympathy, which she would have disained to accept.

Lady Elizabeth was polite, smooth, protective. "Could you ever want my assistance or advice, with so inestimable a friend as Mrs Strictland will be, you know well that you may command my best powers. My affections towards you have been, I may say, always maternal—there were impediments—well, we will think of them no more—we must see you at the Hall—Sir William must know

you—you have been misled, if you believe that he has ever failed in kindness to you."

Rhoda trembled through all her frame. The hand, which Lady Elizabeth had taken, was withdrawn, and the full heart was bursting from the lips, when a torrent of tears, that gushed from her eyes, preserved her discretion, by rendering her unable to speak.

The aunt and niece parted, without either having risen in the good opinion of the other, from their interview, and with an equal disinclination to meet again.

"Well, Sir," said Rhoda, "are you satisfied with me?"

"If you are satisfied with yourself, my dear, I have nothing to say," replied Mr. Wyburg.

In fact, Rhoda *was* satisfied with herself. In having yielded to seeing Lady Elizabeth, she thought that she had given a distinguished proof of self-command; and in the proud indignation

which she had indulged during the visit, she saw nothing but the dignity which she thought due to herself, and the vindication due to the injuries committed against the only object of her present affections.

Mr. Wyburg saw all very differently. "Alas!" thought he, "how must that heart be torn and harrowed, before it can receive, or bring to perfection the seeds of virtue!"

"How sincerely do I pity my poor Rhoda," said Frances.

"Yes, my dear," replied the father, "I pity Miss Strictland as sincerely as you can do, but not exactly upon the same grounds; not because she has not been able to suspend the laws of nature in her favour; not that at seventeen she has lost a friend who had attained his eightieth year; but that she has not been taught to submit, with meekness, to natural and inevitable evils."

"Such warmth of heart, such a glow of grateful remembrance," broke forth

Mr. Ponsonby, "is so amiable, so attractive, that surely, Sir, you must consider Miss Strictland not less an object of admiration than of pity."

"Is it gratitude," returned Mr. Wyburg, calmly, "that would reverse the decree, which has at length given the reward due to a life of painful duty? When Miss Strictland so often repeats that she has lost her all, are her feelings warmed by a consideration for others, or herself?"

"Such reasoning," said Mr. Ponsonby, "would destroy every feeling of the human heart."

"No, Sir," returned Mr. Wyburg, "it would only regulate them—and regulate them by rules which man, as a reasonable, a social, and a dependent being, is bound to observe. Miss Strictland has every good disposition; but it depends solely upon the direction that will now be given them, whether she will be the instrument of happiness to herself and others, or the contrary. Hitherto her duties and her pleasures have been the

same; for the future, they will probably be often widely different. The world, which she is about to enter, must be to *all*, at her age, a school of experience; to her it will be the house of discipline: if she receive its chastisement with docility and meekness, she will be amiable and respected: if she refuse to be instructed, she will be neither one nor the other."

Mr. Wyburg spoke with authority, and his daughter shrunk away to attend her domestic cares, while Mr. Ponsonby resumed his book.

CHAP. VI.

> "He is of churlish disposition,
> And little recks to find the way to heav'n,
> By doing deeds of hospitality."—
>
> *Shakspeare.*

THE discipline, of which Mr. Wyburg had spoken, was in fact begun, and poor Rhoda felt all its harshness.

In return to the communication which Mr. Wyburg had made to Mr. Strictland of the death of his uncle, accompanied by a request to be informed of his wishes and designs respecting Rhoda he received the following letter.

"Dear Sir,

"I could scarcely reconcile it to my strict notions of what is due from every gentleman to veracity, if I were to admit, in its full sense, the promise which

from your letter, I find my late uncle informed you that I had made, to provide, at his death, for his niece.

"I certainly do recollect, some years ago, some conversation on this subject. —The poor old man had began to see the indiscretion he had been guilty of in taking the charge of an orphan not worth a penny, when he was himself so totally unable to provide for her. A consciousness of his folly preyed upon his spirits, and he had then also strangely thrown himself out of the sphere of my father's benevolence.

"The poor old gentleman was unhappy—I could not bear to see him unhappy—and I do remember saying one day, when he was speaking on the subject till the tears ran down his furrowed cheeks, 'My dear Sir, make yourself easy, the girl shall not want a home while I can give her one.'—But how this can be construed into a promise to provide for her, I am totally at a loss to comprehend—more especially

as I find that every thing which my uncle had to leave, is left to Rhoda. To be sure it is but small, and cannot be supposed to be any object to me; yet as a proof of my poor uncle's regard, and as a gage that he depended upon my promise, it would have been gratifying to have had that little pass through my hands to Rhoda's, for ultimately no doubt it ought to be hers; and in this case I should certainly have considered myself as obliged to provide for her, in the fullest sense of the words.—Now, I am sure, my dear Sir, you will be of my opinion that I can be under no such obligation. I should not, however, nicely scrutinize the point of obligation, if it any way corresponded with prudence to follow the inclinations of my heart—but to you, my dear Sir, I may say, that I am not the opulent man the world supposes me to be. Perhaps you may have understood that the circumstance of having no child limits my interest in the property, which I received with Mrs.

Strictland, to the period of her natural life; and it is no more than a respect due to the society, who have hitherto done me the honour to look upon me as an equal, to take all the care in my power that there shall not come a time, when I shall fall below it.

"Thus you see that I have little to spare from the present, and nothing to alienate for the future. However, you may be assured that I do not mean to be worse than my word: I think you know me to be too much of a gentleman for that.

"I will receive the girl into my house, and Mrs. Strictland desires me to assure you that she shall be happy to give her all the protection in her power. At present we are on the point of leaving town for our usual summer excursion. Where we shall go is at present very uncertain; but you shall hear from me when any thing is fixed.—Perhaps we may pay my father and mother a visit before we settle in town again for the

winter, and if so, we can bring up Rhoda with us; but at present it would be inconvenient to add another to our travelling party. The kindness which you express towards Rhoda, and the friendship which has always subsisted between yourself and my late uncle, embolden me to suggest that the most eligible plan for the present, will be that Rhoda shall remain with you, for which, no doubt, she will make you every proper acknowledgment, as my uncle has enabled her to do; and we will settle some final plan for the future, when we have had a little time to look about us, and consider what can best be done.

"Pray give my love to Rhoda, and assure her that I shall always be happy to serve her to the best of my power.

"I beg my best compliments to your family; and I am, my dear Sir,

"With the greatest esteem,

"Yours, very truly,

"THOMAS STRICTLAND."

Mr. Wyburg in the prosecution of the duties, to which the death of his old friend had called him, had found a letter addressed to himself, containing, not only an earnest appeal to his kindness in behalf of Rhoda, but the information upon which he had grounded his application to Mr. Strictland. He had not accurately attended to the form of the words, which had conveyed to his mind a promise on that gentleman's part to provide for his relation, but the knowledge of the destitute situation, in which Rhoda was left, had naturally led him to the conclusion that nothing short of an entire provision could be designed by the engagement to receive her into his house.

On the receipt of a letter, which convinced him that the same conclusion was not always drawn from the same premises, he referred, with a feeling of impatient indignation, to the authority, which it appeared he was supposed so far to have exceeded — yet after a second

perusal of the necessary document, with all his critical abilities newly sharpened, the original words seemed still to his apprehension to bear him out, in the interpretation which he had at first given them. They were as follows:

"In imploring the continued exertion of your friendship in favour of my poor Rhoda, I seek to give her a wise counsellor, and a warning guide, a guardian of her moral feelings, and an instructor in her religious duties. I know, my good friend, that to all this heavenly food you would most cheerfully add the 'mammon of unrighteousness,' but remember that you have it not to give beyond the wants of your own family:—and you will not well fulfil the demands that I have upon you, if you give extension to the imprudence of which I have been guilty. You know, however, as well as I do, what you ought *not* to do in this case; and I can the better trust to your integ-

rity, as I believe that you will have no temptation to infringe it.

"My nephew, though of slow affections towards others, and not wanting in attention to his own interest, is not, I think, without some warm blood in his veins; and this was once set so briskly a flowing by a foolish fit of distress, in which he witnessed me, that he gave me his word, Rhoda should feel no pecuniary wants when I was no more.

"We have frequently had farther conversation on the same subject, and I have lately had the satisfaction of knowing that Mrs. Strictland has explicitly consented to receive Rhoda into her house, whenever mine can no longer afford her a shelter. I need not add that, had I had an option, this would not have been the shelter which I should have chosen. It will not, however, be a disreputable one in the eye *of the world*, that golden image to

which we all bow! It will preserve to Rhoda her rightful station in society; it will give her a place in her own family: and although it will not render her independent, she will depend only on those who ought to provide for her.

"My good friend, you may perceive that *all* your lessons of wisdom are not quite thrown away upon me. I am practising a little of that moral chemistry, which you say produces the balm of life—but I feel my process is imperfect, for with all my labour I can extract so little good from the evil which oppresses me, that I am unable to pursue the subject one word farther.

"Oh, exert all your powers to make my poor Rhoda, a more rational animal than you have ever been able to make me!

"When I am dead, write to my nephew, and claim in my name the fulfilment of the promise which he has made me—and, *if possible*, teach the dear girl to bow to circumstances, with-

out the sacrifice of the *whole* of her happiness."

Mr. Wyburg's first impulse, on comparing the letters of the uncle and the nephew, was to communicate that of the latter to Rhoda, and at the same time to make her an offer of an asylum in his own house.

Nor was it the interference of self-interest that connected the feeling. It was a more extended view of the case.

Beyond a precarious shelter for a few years, he had nothing to give; and were Rhoda to accept, as he doubted not but that she would, this temporary resource, the consequence must be, either finally to separate her from her family connections, and with this, to lose all hopes of assistance and support from any of her relations, or if, in some future hour, she should be compelled to have recourse to them, it must then be with aggravated repugnance on her part, and

probably with increased disinclination towards her on theirs.

There was weight enough in these considerations to have determined Mr. Wyburg to conquer the disgust which Mr. Strictland's letter had excited; but the views of this excellent man were on no subject bounded by this 'visible diurnal sphere.' The accommodation of the perishing body was with him as dust upon the balance, in comparison with the moral culture of the soul; and he could foresee that the incorporation of Rhoda into her family, under whatever mortification of her pride, or thwartings of her will, would be more favourable to her moral character than the perpetuation of the angry and resentful feelings, by which she would be determined in the rejection of their present limited kindness.

Such reflections determined Mr. Wyburg to proceed in the course which he had entered, and rather to endeavour to smooth the path that had

been appointed for Rhoda to tread, than offer a hand to turn her from it.

"Rhoda must begin to see things as they are," said Mr. Wyburg.—"Hitherto, alas! she has viewed life through the false medium interposed between her and the realities of this mortal state, by over-weaning affection and unbounded indulgence;—but this can be no longer—and perhaps it is happy for her that it cannot.—Our terrors and our faults are often alike the offspring of imperfect vision."

"My dear Miss Strictland, I have a letter from your cousin."

"Well, Sir!"—said Rhoda, her under lip quivering.

"You had better read it, my dear:—it will best explain its own meaning."

Rhoda took the letter, and read it with a calmness that surprised Mr. Wyburg.

"It is decisive," said Rhoda, as she returned the paper.

"Not quite so much as I could have

wished"—returned Mr. Wyburg. It would have been more agreeable to you, I think, had Mr. Strictland been able to have named the time when he would have you join his family."

"Surely," said Rhoda, "you do not believe that after having read this letter, I shall ever enter Mr. Strictland's doors?"

"Certainly I do believe it," returned Mr. Wyburg.—"Then, Sir, you know me little," said Rhoda. "I should have received his *voluntary* protection with reluctance—his grudging permission to reside under his roof, I will never accept."

"Have you considered the alternative?" said Mr. Wyburg.

"I have scarcely had time,"—replied Rhoda. "I had understood from you, Sir, that the matter was arranged by ————. It was to a will that I never disobeyed, that I believed. I had submitted; but it appears that the will was never fully explained, or never

understood — that no arrangement had been made. I am then at liberty to act for myself, and while I am so, I will never become the inmate of Mr. Strictland's house."

"Read this,"—said Mr. Wyburg, giving to Rhoda the letter of the uncle, on which he had acted in his application to Mr. Strictland. Rhoda obeyed. —"Oh my lost all!"—said she, clasping her hands together;—"thou shalt not speak in vain!—I will do more than thou requirest!—I will bow to circumstances; but it will be with the sacrifice of the *whole* of my happiness!"

"We cannot sacrifice the *whole* of our happiness," said Mr. Wyburg, "when we obey the dictates of duty and of reason."

Rhoda probably heard not Mr. Wyburg's remark, she certainly made no reply to it.—She arose and left the room.

CHAP. VII.

"I do affect a sorrow, but I have it too."
Shakspeare.

From this period the character of Rhoda appeared to her younger companions to be wholly changed.—She became cold and silent, with even the affectation of submission to all that occurred.—She gave no opinion, she expressed no will. The slightest intimation of a wish from Mr. Wyburg, was sufficient to determine her decision in the most trifling, as in the most important matters—but she gave him not her confidence—she sought not his advice—she seemed to consider herself only as a machine, which was to receive from his hand all its movements.

"How touching is this self-abandonment!"—said Mr. Ponsonby to Frances, one day in the hearing of Mr. Wyburg—"Miss Strictland, in all her gaiety,

in all the glow of colouring, which once accompanied all that she did, was less interesting, less captivating to the heart and the imagination, than in these sad moments when her whole existence seems to be buried in the grave of her uncle."

"She is wholly changed!"—replied her sorrowing friend.—"She has no heart for any of us, and I much fear that the duties and pleasures of life, are equally past for her."

"Miss Strictland," said Mr. Wyburg, "is not changed. Her gaiety and her coldness were alike the indulgence of her own feelings uncontrouled by a reference to those of others. The joys of life are not past for her, nor, I trust, its duties; but I fear that she will owe the knowledge of the latter rather to the stern lessons of adversity, than to the milder precepts of general benevolence."

"Miss Strictland had a heart that overflowed with kindness and sympathy," said Mr. Ponsonby—"till this

fatal stroke, which seems to have cut her off from the source of every social feeling."

" But she feels for herself," said Mr. Wyburg.

" No, Sir!" said Mr. Ponsonby, " Miss Strictland's feelings are still those of gratitude, of the warmest affection!—She thinks not of herself—she thinks only of what is gone for ever!—Oh, would she once recal her thoughts from the grave, how blessed would she make all around her!"

" And would she *not* recal them," said Mr. Wyburg, " if she wished to make blessed all around her?"

" She does bless all around her," returned Mr. Ponsonby: " it is the first of blessings to look at her, and pity her."

" Let us do more than pity her," returned Mr. Wyburg; " let us teach her to take an interest in something beyond herself."

" Oh the felicity of being able to

teach Miss Strictland such a lesson!"—exclaimed Mr. Ponsonby.

Mr. Wyburg looked at him, and took his resolution; but before this resolution could take effect, Mr. Ponsonby had assiduously followed up Mr. Wyburg's injunction, and Rhoda gave evident symptoms that all her affections were not buried with her uncle.

When Mr. Ponsonby spoke she listened with complacency; the flower which he gave her, was worn through the day, and it enlivened her sable garments the next morning, until it was replaced by a more freshly gathered favourite. She suffered him to read to her, to talk to her, and if she did not yet condescend to speak to him of herself, she permitted him to perceive that his attentions offered her the most acceptable alleviation of her sorrows.

The genial warmth, that seemed thus to have been communicated to the heart of Rhoda, presently extended itself to all around her. The affectionate Frances

began again to rejoice in the confidence of her friend, again to feel that she was dear to her; and she felt her hope revive that the pleasures and the duties of life, were not, at eighteen, passed for ever, from her whom she loved.

"Could I live always with you, my dear Frances," would Rhoda say—"might I remain under the eye of your father, I might still be—not happy—no, that is impossible—but not wholly wretched—not wholly worthless!—And why should not this be?—My little pittance would in some degree indemnify him for the only part of his kindness that *can* be repaid, and for the few necessaries further that I should want, my own hand might supply the means of procuring them.—The world is nothing to me—I despise it, and all its gewgaws—but most I despise the mean spirits that make the want of the possession of its riches, the measure of their kindness."

"Would not my father say," re-

turned Frances—"that there was pride, and not dignity in that thought?—We must take the world and human nature as we find them. I believe there are many good things in both; and I think, Rhoda, there is no body better fitted to appreciate what is good in either than yourself."

"All that is good in the world, or human nature," replied Rhoda, fervently, "I believe to be comprised within the walls of this small, this hospitable mansion."

"If you, my dear Rhoda," said Frances, "who have scarcely ever looked beyond it, can find so much good in so narrow a compass, why should you suppose that in all the world besides there is no more to be found?"

"I have looked beyond it to the Hall," said Rhoda, "I have looked at Grosvenor-square, — and — what have I found?"

"You have found," returned Frances, "that relationship is not supposed to imply acquaintance; you have found

that where your good qualities are unknown, you are not an object of affection.—Is there any thing very surprising, very revolting in this? But though acquaintance is not acknowledged, nor affection professed, protection and kindness are offered."

"I would not willingly accept either protection or kindness which is not grounded on affection," said Rhoda.

"In this instance it was impossible that it should be so grounded," replied Frances—"but affection may be superadded; and then, my dear Rhoda, the world will not appear to you such an arid waste, as you now esteem it to be."

"Do you suppose," said Rhoda, "that I can ever love Lady Elizabeth; that I can ever desire she should love me?"

"It is not necessary to your happiness that you should love her in the sense in which you use the word," said Frances—"but even between you and Lady

Elizabeth, there may be an exchange of good will, and acts of obligation."

"I will *not* be obliged to Lady Elizabeth," said Rhoda.

"That will not be *her* fault," returned Frances, gently.

"No," replied Rhoda, bursting into tears—"I see that you think the fault, as the misery, will be all my own; and too truly it may be so!"

Frances soothed her irritable friend in the best manner that she could; and Rhoda having exhausted herself with a violent fit of grief, for which she would have found it difficult to have assigned an adequate cause, at length threw her arms around Frances, exclaiming,

"Forgive me, forgive me!—I am the most wayward of creatures.—I must, I am sure, weary you all; but I am determined to have more command over myself. Yes, yes; I will resign the *whole* of my happiness without a sigh—you shall see how contented, and how miserable I can be."

"It is not in nature to be contented and miserable," said Frances—"but to see the good as well as the evil of our lot, is at once our duty and our privilege; as dependant and as rational beings—and this is all, my dear Rhoda, that is wanting to afford you such a competent portion of happiness, as would enable you to look forward with hope and cheerfulness through life."

"No," said Rhoda: "hope I have none; and where there is no hope, there can be no cheerfulness."

Rhoda was perfectly sincere in believing that she was miserable for the rest of her life. It is the common mistake of minds new to disappointment; but she had also a self-complacency in supposing that there was a strength in her own character, which would enable her to prove the truth of her declaration, that her affections were buried in the grave of her uncle.—To distinguish herself from her fellow mortals was the chimera of her mind—it was only by re-

peated experience of the danger of such a guide, that she could become worthy of being loved by them.

Every passing day now furnished proofs that it was not by the inextinguishableness of sorrow that Rhoda was to prove herself superior to the common order of mortals.

Mr. Wyburg had laid aside the strictness of his moral precepts in consideration of her weakness. Frances, although always reasonable, was always gentle; and Mr. Ponsonby pleased her still better, by the warmth with which he sympathized in her feelings, without one attempt to correct them. Even the civilities of Sir William and Lady Elizabeth began to be no longer distasteful. Sir William was not without some of the softer parts of human nature, and Lady Elizabeth was perfectly well bred.

Sir William shook Rhoda so kindly by the hand, and called her his pretty niece with so much good humour, while

Lady Elizabeth spoke so smoothly, and professed so much desire to give her pleasure, that Rhoda's self-love outweighed her prepossessions, and her resentment gave way.

"I have been unjust," said she; "I was not before known—how could I expect to be beloved?"

CHAP. VIII.

"Smooth runs the water where the brook is deepest."
Shakspeare.

The little family at the vicarage seemed to be fast advancing to perfect serenity, and Rhoda had begun to look for returning happiness from more than one source, when one morning, Frances being busied with her domestic cares, Rhoda had withdrawn to a little summer house in the garden, with her book.

She had scarcely, however, opened the volume, when a hurried step, which passed under the window, disturbed her attention; and the sudden appearance of Mr. Ponsonby, in evident disorder of mind, put to flight all thoughts of study.

"I beg pardon," said he, "I wish not to intrude—but yet I come"—

"Come! come for what?" said Rhoda with her usual quickness of feeling—"you are disturbed.—What is amiss?"

"I come to take leave of you," said Mr. Ponsonby.

"Then I am undone," said Rhoda.

"Dearest Rhoda!" cried Mr. Ponsonby.

"If you leave me," said Rhoda, "what will become of me?—Who but you can enter into all my feelings?—Who will understand my every look but you?—Who else will understand the enduring nature of my sorrows?"

"I leave you with the kindest, the most sympathetic of friends," said Mr. Ponsonby. "Alas! my absence can make no chasm in your life—but you shall supply to me the charm of being ever near you!"

"But why will you leave us?" asked Rhoda.

"My father calls me hence—most

hastily calls me hence, and leaves me no appeal from his will."

"There is no family misfortune?—no evil that threatens any belonging to you?"—solicitously inquired Rhoda.

"Not that I *know* of," replied Mr. Ponsonby. "As to my suspicions, my conjectures, it does not become me to speak of them."

"To *me*, surely you may," cried Rhoda. "Oh, how much sympathy do I owe you! What a consolation would it be to my cold heart, if I could repay you!"

"You do repay me—you more than repay me," cried Mr. Ponsonby, as he ventured tremblingly to touch the fair hand of Rhoda, which rested on the table before which they were standing.

"Oh then lovely cause of my banishment! forgive the presumption of a father's fear! Hope, I dare assure thee, never mingled with my devotion."

"Your father fears my influence with you!" said Rhoda, in a tone of seve-

rity: "do I understand you aright?—Go, Mr. Ponsonby, and tell this timid father, that the poor, the dependant Rhoda, disdains alike his favours and his fear!"

"Include not me in your disdain," exclaimed Mr. Ponsonby. "Heaven is my witness, how guiltless I am of any thought that can offend you!"

"I do believe it," said Rhoda. "My own heart assures me of it—but since friendship, disinterested as ours, cannot escape suspicion,—farewell!—We do not meet again."

"Stay,—I conjure you to stay," said Mr. Ponsonby; "and suffer me to disclose the whole of my heart to you."

"No!" said Rhoda, "where there must be no friendship, there ought to be no confidence."

"Oh, we *must* be friends!" said Mr. Ponsonby. "What arbitrary will shall interdict the feelings of the heart?—If your good wishes do not follow me through life, what will there be in all

that it can promise, worthy of an effort?"

"I will not live the mercenary fear of any one," said Rhoda; "and therefore all intercourse between us must cease—but I shall not therefore forget all that I owe you."

"Talk not of obligation!" said Mr. Ponsonby, impatiently. "The hour of independence may come—it would the sooner come, if I could hope that it would not be indifferent to you."

"Nothing of good, that befalls you, can be indifferent to me," said Rhoda.

"Then let me thank you for that word," said Mr. Ponsonby, gently taking the hand of Rhoda, when Mr. Wyburg at that moment appeared at the door of the summer house.

"Mr. Ponsonby," said Mr. Wyburg, "the horses are ready, and I believe that you have no time to lose."

"Then, farewell," said Rhoda, "and take my best wishes and warmest gratitude with you."

Mr. Ponsonby still held the precious hand of Rhoda between his, not daring, under the eye of Mr. Wyburg, to raise it to his lips, yet having no power over himself to resign it.

"Will you not bid Miss Strictland farewell?" said Mr. Wyburg.

"Oh heavens!---this is too much!" said Mr. Ponsonby, and dropping the hand of Rhoda, he rushed out of the summer house. Mr. Wyburg followed him, and Rhoda in a few moments did the same.–She encountered Mr. Wyburg on his return from having seen Mr. Ponsonby depart -- he would have passed her without speaking, as thinking that it was a moment when she might wish to be left to herself.

She stopped him :—

"I know not," said she, with a look of disdain, "who has dared to add degradation to poverty; but if you, Sir, can guess who has informed the father of Mr. Ponsonby, that an indigent and

artful girl has endeavoured to make a property of his son, I shall be obliged to you to correct the information, and to apprize him, that Rhoda Strictland is the guardian of his son's honour, and that she will take care that it is not the prey of the mercenary views of any one."

Rhoda would have passed on.

"I understand your reproach, my dear Miss Strictland," said Mr. Wyburg, stopping her. "I will reply to it. Whatever information Mr. Ponsonby's father has received upon the subject in question, he has received from me; and be assured that it was not against the effects of art I warned him, but the natural consequences of a warm and susceptible heart, hourly exposed to the influence of more than common attractions. Nor did I give him this warning from any worldly balance between riches and merit. Mr. Ponsonby is not rich, will not be rich.—He must owe competence and independence to

his own exertions; and I appeal to the guardian of his honour, not less I do believe than of his happiness, whether it comported with either, that he should entertain and communicate hopes and wishes, that probably could never be gratified?"

"Forgive me, my dear Sir," said Rhoda; "forgive my petulance—I see all your wisdom, all your goodness. If what you have done was necessary to the happiness of Mr. Ponsonby, no one can rejoice at it more heartily than I do, desolated as I shall be by his absence;—but as to any farther care," added she, her cheek crimsoning as she spoke, "it was needless. My affections are for ever dead."

Mr. Wyburg smiled, but Rhoda saw not the expression that the smile contained,—she was absorbed in her own thoughts.

"I am glad," said she, as she turned into the house, "that Mr. Ponsonby is poor!"

"My dear Frances," said she, entering the room where her friend was busily employed.—"We have lost Mr. Ponsonby---oh, how we shall miss him!"

"We shall indeed!" said Frances, in a tone of voice that made Rhoda look at her.---

"How now, Frances!—have you a cold?"

"No," returned Frances, and pursued her employment.

Rhoda fell into a second reverie.

"Of whose attractions," said she to herself, "was Mr. Wyburg afraid?"

This was a question, which with her sad cold heart, it might have been supposed that Rhoda would have wished to have had answered, in the way the least flattering to her vanity---but did she so wish?

Perhaps this was what she scarcely knew herself. The doubt, however, made her watch Frances through the whole day with more than usual attention; and her heart was more at ease,

when at the close of it, she came to the conclusion, that Frances was too much alive to the wishes and wants of all around her, to be thinking of any of her own.

" You and I, Frances," said she, as they were taking their evening walk, " nearly resemble one another in one particular, in which perhaps we are unlike all the rest of our sex: we may bid defiance to the power of love--but, alas! I owe my insensibility to misfortune, you derive yours from reason."

A faint blush, that passed over the cheek of Frances, made her more interesting to the eye of Rhoda, than she had ever appeared before.

" 'Let not him who putteth on his armour boast himself, as he who taketh it off,' " returned Frances, with a smile. " The brave man does not talk of his courage."

" Mine was only a simple observation," replied Rhoda. " Alas! I have no cause to boast! I am but the creature of my

feelings—I am what they make me—but you, Frances"—

"Pray let us not talk of ourselves," said Frances. "I am persuaded that it is the subject we know least about. Let us rather see what is doing at the Hall—you have not been there I scarcely know when."

"Lady Elizabeth will so reproach me!" said Rhoda. "She will say so much!"

"And feel so little!" said Frances.

"Perhaps so," replied Rhoda. "She certainly does not feel for every body; but I cannot think that Lady Elizabeth is without feeling."

And with Rhoda's present standard for the good qualities of her acquaintance, it was not surprising that she should think so.

Her mind was in that morbid state which seeks rather the anodyne of flattery, than the tonic of truth.

She imputed the peculiar graciousness of Lady Elizabeth towards herself,

to her own powers of pleasing; and when she failed in obligingness to others, she was more inclined to impute the failure to the want of merit in the person neglected, than to any imperfection in Lady Elizabeth.—Rhoda had yet to learn, that in judging of the good qualities of our acquaintance, we ought to form our estimate from their conduct to others, rather than from that which they hold towards ourselves.

CHAP. IX.

" Good sentences, and well pronounced.—
" They would be better, if well followed."—
Shakspeare.

LADY Elizabeth was this evening more than usually conciliating.

" This is so kind!—this is so flattering!" said she, as the two young ladies walked into the room—" and keeps one in such good humour with one's self, at my age, and Sir William's, to be sought by such young people. My dear Rhoda—Miss Wyburg—I cannot tell you how much we are obliged. Where is Sir William? He must not lose a moment of your company."

Sir William came in with a parcel of letters in his hand.

" So, my pretty Rhoda, how do you do? I have good news for you.—My son

and Mrs. Strictland are coming almost immediately," said he, addressing himself to Lady Elizabeth; "and I dare say, that they mean to take Rhoda away with them."

"I should very much doubt that," said Lady Elizabeth. "It cannot be expected that they should have room for her on their tour—but what makes them come so soon? I am sure, I did not expect them this month."

"Oh, I don't know," said Sir William, carelessly. "I told them that we should always be glad to see them when it best suited their convenience, and I dare say, they thought most of that."

"I dare say they did," said Lady Elizabeth, in an under voice, — then correcting herself—"Oh, to be sure, Sir William; I am very glad they should do so. All I wish is to be able to make their visit here as pleasant as possible, and I fear the smell of paint will scarcely be gone, if they come so soon; and I had hoped to have got the *chaise longue*

for Mrs. Strictland's dressing-room.--- Poor thing!—she has such bad headaches, that she spends half her time in her own apartment, and I wish nothing so much as to make her quite comfortable."

Rhoda heard all this, and repeated to herself, " she will say so much, and feel so little."

" But, Rhoda," said Sir William, " you look grave.---I thought that your little heart would have beat with the prospect of the gay world, which you are about to enter."

" My heart can never beat with pleasure at the thoughts of leaving my earliest, my dearest friends," said Rhoda, laying her hand upon that of Frances.

" Well, now, that is so amiable!" said the sentimental Lady Elizabeth. " Miss Wyburg, I am sure that you must feel the value of such a friend."

" *I* feel the value of such a friend," rejoined Rhoda, warmly. " The advantage is all on my side."

" Well, but Sir William," said Lady Elizabeth; " when do our dear friends come? It is so sweet of Mrs Strictladn to come and vegetate at this dull place—I am sure we are eternally obliged to her."

" Oh, they may come any time—to-night—to-morrow—the next day—they don't like to be tied to a moment, lest any thing should come in their way that they like better. They say we must not expect them till we see them."

" How is that possible?" said Lady Elizabeth, sharply; then modulating her voice to the true well-bred pitch—

" To be sure, people, who live in the world, and are so sought, cannot be masters of their time—and they know that we don't mind such things—and we are always ready.—Only really I must go and give orders for the *chaise longue;* for I dare say poor Mrs. Strict-land will have one of her head-aches with travelling.—Good night, Miss Wy-burg—good night, Rhoda—you shall

not fail to know in time what you are to do."

"What I had *best* do," said Rhoda, the first moment that she was alone with Frances, "would be to run away from all these people; and I am very much inclined to do so. How could I believe for an instant that Lady Elizabeth had a heart!"

Frances sighed.

"Would it be the best to run away?" said she. Then after a moment's pause. —"Come," added she, "let us not frighten ourselves---this dreaded future may not be half so terrific as the picture of it."

"It can scarcely be more so," said Rhoda. "Already you hear that I am a burthen---already I am considered but as another domestic, who is to hold herself in readiness to obey the orders which she is to receive; and this, even the well-bred Lady Elizabeth can let me understand."

"Good breeding is a form," said Frances; "good humour is a quality. We have no reason to wonder if the one changes with the occasion, or that the other is the same on all occasions."

"My dear sententious friend!" said Rhoda. "I wish I may be able to recollect some of your fine sayings when I shall most need them."

"You will have no call for any body's wisdom but your own," returned Frances, "if you will resolve never to speak till you have thought."

"That's like telling a man that he would be brave, if he had courage," said Rhoda, laughing. "I lack wisdom, because I cannot think: I can only feel."

"You can think if you please," said Frances.

"And what if I do think — when from henceforth I am to be a machine in the hands of others?"

"Far from it," replied Frances. "Can any situation call more for reasoning, or self-controul, than that upon which

you are about to enter? You must pay the passive duty of a child, without feeling the affections of one; you must shew respect, when perhaps it will be impossible to feel reverence; you must yield your will, while you ought to keep your opinions; you——"

"Hold, hold," interrupted Rhoda: "if you detail any more such duties, I shall certainly hang myself."

"I may be mistaken," said Frances. "I know little of Mr. and Mrs. Strictland, and still less of what is called the world. All may be very different from what I suppose it to be."

"Oh," said Rhoda, with a deep drawn sigh, "I have had this world depicted to me before, and with features so ugly, that I think it impossible I should not hate it.--- Yet I was told that I should love it!—love it even for itself.—How, my dear Frances, can this be possible?"

"I know not," said Frances. "The world that we inhabit I love—and I

know why I love it.—The signs of universal love are on every side of us. Look around you.—Is there a single object but what is formed to inspire affection? Those majestic trees—the undulating verdure of those fields—that luxuriant harvest; do they not all speak the benevolence and the divinity of the Lord that made them?—The breeze is loaded with perfume—the branches with harmony—the voice of joy and thankfulness is around us; and shall we not love, rejoice, and be grateful?—But how I should love a world made up of brick and stone—of dust and dissonancy—of contention and repining, I cannot tell."

"And is that, think you," said Rhoda, "the world to which I am going?"

"I hope not," said Frances; "but I shall be anxious to know what your world really is, and what are its charms, by which so many people, wiser and better than ourselves, are captivated."

"At any rate, there is no fear that I shall love it too well," said Rhoda.

It was not long before Rhoda had a glimpse into this same world, the subject to her young mind of so much hope and fear.

The next morning the gossip of the household informed Rhoda of the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Strictland at the Hall, in the middle of the night, as the rustic reckonings of time called it —but according to Lady Elizabeth's phrase, "at a late hour on Tuesday evening."

From the moment that Rhoda received this intelligence, she remained in a state of such nervous irritation, as deprived her of the power of employing herself for two seconds together.——Every sound made her start—every person, who approached the house, she mistook for a messenger from the Hall; and when the day passed without her receiving any notice from thence, she was sure that Mr. and Mrs. Strictland could not be

arrived. It was impossible, if they were, that she should not have heard something from them.

The servants were questioned—they maintained the correctness of their information, and added such circumstances as left no possibility of doubt.—Rhoda's proud heart swelled, and her cheek glowed—but she disdained to speak. Her kind friends would not observe her emotion; and Mr. Wyburg, laying aside his usual solitary study, took up a book of more general amusement, and read aloud.

Rhoda's spirits were soothed, and when she bade him good night, she said, "I dare say Mrs. Strictland was too ill to see any body to-day; I shall hear something to-morrow."

"Probably," returned Mr. Wyburg.

But to-morrow, and the next day, and the next came, and Rhoda heard nothing.

Rhoda laughed nervously when with her friends—and cried bitterly when

she was alone, and on the evening of the fourth day, declared that she felt herself once again an independent being.

"After this usage," said she, "I can be under no obligation to do the thing in the world the most repugnant to my feelings.—No, dear saint!—I would have obeyed thee, had it been possible—but well I know, thou wouldst not have thy Rhoda degrade herself."

"Is it degradation," said Mr. Wyburg, "to attend the will of those, on whom it is our duty to depend?"

"I owe no duty to Mr. and Mrs. Strictland," said Rhoda.

"Are they not the appointed delegates of him, who had a right to all your duty?" said Mr. Wyburg.

"But duties so exacted!—a will so indolently manifested!"—said Rhoda.

"Are difficult to perform—is painful to submit to;—but it is not therefore less right, nor, of consequence, less necessary to do so," returned Mr. Wyburg.

"And would you, indeed, Sir, after such treatment, have me to accept favours from Mr. and Mrs. Strictland? Would you have me ready to move or stop, at their imperious nod?" said Rhoda.

"These are lofty words, my dear," returned Mr. Wyburg; "but let us reduce them to a little common sense and matter of fact.—That you are not treated with all the consideration and attention which affection, or perhaps good nature would dictate, I am ready to allow—but it is not the neglect of friends, or even of acquaintance of which you have to complain. — A promise of protection from some of your nearest relatives has been given you—you have reason to believe that it will be performed—the *mode* was not stipulated for, nor ascertained.—We cannot, therefore, ground complaint upon a form merely, although it may not be that which we like—but even if we had a right to do so, it would be difficult, at present, to say to what

we object—for, in truth, *nothing* has been done."

"Is neglect nothing?" said Rhoda.

"Nothing to the purpose of our argument," returned Mr. Wyburg; "because we neither know from whence it springs, nor how it will end.—We ought to permit those, who have a right to be the first movers, to move as they please; and not to take offence, before we know that the movement will be offensive."

"Oh, Sir," said Rhoda, "all this is very wise."

"And very unfeeling, perhaps you think," said Mr. Wyburg; "but is it unkind to shew you the truth, when the truth is less painful than error?"

"Nothing can be more painful than the truth," said Rhoda, "if the truth is to compel me to become an inmate of any house, of which Mr. Strictland is the master."

"I hope that you will soon have cause to think otherwise," said Mr. Wyburg.

But this, Rhoda was confident in her own mind, would never be the case.

"Ah," said she, when she was alone with Frances, "I really believe that dear father of yours thinks that he could allay the raging waves of the ocean by the voice of reason."

"If any human reason could do so," replied Frances, with the enthusiasm of affection, "his must do it."

"Yet I am persuaded," said Rhoda, "that with all his sermonizing and palliatives, he will soon see the business so exactly in the same light that I do, that he will himself counsel me to have done with my cold-hearted relations, and trust only to myself for support: and after all," added she, "is there not more happiness, more dignity, in the scanty meal and coarse covering which we owe to our own industry, than in the dainties and the delicacy of ornament, which we derive from the bounty, perhaps the grudging bounty, of another?"

"The grudging bounty is indeed a

bitter pill," said Frances. "But the bounty of benevolence, which it is the purest pleasure, and the highest distinction to *bestow*, it can never be degradation to *receive!*"

"The bounty of benevolence," said Rhoda, "I am in no danger of being offered; and the grudging bounty of selfish pride I never will accept. The degradation shall fall where it ought to do: not on the member of the family who gets honest bread by honest industry, but on such as force her thus to vindicate her own character—and you will see, Frances, that your father will come over to my opinion."

A change there certainly was somewhere; whether in the opinions of Mr. Wyburg, or of Rhoda, a little time will shew.

CHAP. X.

———————" On her bestowed
Too much of ornament ; in outward show
Elaborate, of inward less exact."

Milton.

RHODA'S heroics were not put to the test quite so soon as she expected. The next morning brought her the following letter from Lady Elizabeth :

" It would be too flattering to our self-love, my dear Rhoda, to believe that the impatience which has been felt by your friends at Strictland Hall, to have you amongst them, has been shared by you. It would be an affront at once to your acuteness and your feelings, to make any apology for having suffered the few days that have elapsed since the arrival of Mrs. Strictland, to pass without our sending to you. I am

sure that you anticipate all I can have to say upon that point. I have only to refer you to your own heart, for the conviction that we could not thus have deprived ourselves of the pleasures of your society, but from the existing circumstances under which we have been placed; and which it was quite impossible to controul. The plain matter of fact is, that poor Mrs. Strictland, as I foretold, was so deranged by her journey, that she literally kept her room during the two first days; and even I did not approach her but on tiptoe, scarcely daring to speak, unless in a whisper; and going to her merely that I might have ocular demonstration that she had every accommodation which we could afford her.

"When she did creep out amongst us, she really would not consent that you should see her 'so poor a creature' —as she called it—although I do acknowledge that this did appear to me to be an unnecessary scruple; for she

must charm at all times, and in all circumstances—but there was no contending with the delicacy of her modesty.

"Yesterday, most unfortunately—but the thing had been fixed the very day after Mr. and Mrs. Strictland came, and when I had not an idea that poor Mrs. Strictland was so very much indisposed;—yesterday, I say, unfortunately we had a hundred people dined with us; and I need not say to my dear Rhoda, how mortifying and distressing it would have been to our feelings to have had her with us at a time when we could not have given her our whole attention. But all this *contre temps*, I hope, is now quite passed, and we shall be able a little to attend to our own wishes.

"Come to us then, my dear, to-day, as soon after you receive this as you possibly can, and stay with us till the last moment. The carriage shall take you home in the evening, so that you need not fear the lateness of the hour. I

press this the rather, as I much fear that we shall lose our dear guests to-morrow, or next day at farthest.—This lovely weather makes them impatient to continue their tour, which we cannot blame them for: and we have the less reason to complain, as they most kindly promise to make out their visit on their return.—It is then, I believe, that they purpose to take you up on their return to town—but I only mention this *en passant*, as I do not presume to interfere in any of their arrangements, being quite sure that all, which they do, will be the kindest and the best.

"It must be confessed that Mrs. Strictland gives a very pregnant proof of this, in so absolutely insisting upon being introduced to you *now*—which, considering the delicacy of her health, and the little leisure that she has at this moment, probably would not have appeared so indispensable a ceremony to any one of less delicate feelings,—seeing that you are to meet again so

soon, and are in future to be so much together — but she says, she must know you that she may begin to love you.—How amiable! — Pray, my dear, oblige me so far, as to wear that beautiful hat which you had on the other night—you never looked more to your advantage.—I wish you to make a favourable impression; and you know, my love, that the first blow is half the battle!

" With most affectionate compliments to Mr. and Miss Wyburg, I am, my dear Rhoda's evèr attached,

" E. S."

Rhoda perused this " grain of wheat in a bushel of chaff," with a mingled feeling that she was unable to define.—It certainly was not that of the gratitude which the *expression* of so much kindness seemed to demand, nor yet the resentment, which a conviction of its duplicity might have justified. She was willing to credit the wonders that

her own merit had wrought, and which it might still produce; but she was conscious of mortification, when she found that she was to share the triumph with her *hat!*—Of Mrs. Strictland she was unable to form any precise idea—she could see no consonancy between the imbecile selfishness which made her exclude herself from her family for two days on account of a head-ache, and the warmth of feeling which demanded a new object for affection; between the protracted time and limited period to which her own visit had been confined, and the resolute determination to see her.

"Did you ever see Mrs. Strictland?" said Rhoda to Frances. "Do you know the kind of person that she is?"

"I have never seen her," said Frances; "for you know that it is only people of the first distinction in the neighbourhood who are admitted at the Hall, when Mrs. Strictland is there — and she never comes to church;—but I have heard my father say, that when first she was mar-

ried to Mr. Strictland, she was a very lovely woman—much admired, and very sensible to admiration. — The time for this must be a little passed.—All I hear of her at present is, that she is very nervous, and very delicate:—that the having no children is a very great mortification to her, and if possible, still more to Mr. Strictland, as most of the property that she brought him, if there be no child, goes from him at Mrs. Strictland's death.—This makes him rapacious of all he can seize and appropriate to his own use, during her life:—and hence disputes arise between them, as she would spend and he would accumulate. Lady Elizabeth is supposed to pour oil upon the waves as much as she can: perhaps from the christian principle of promoting peace; but not without suspicion of acting from less pure motives. At any rate she wishes to keep well with her daughter-in-law, whom she considers as the only remaining link between herself and the

world of fashion, from which she has been so long banished, and which still makes,in her estimation, the only world worth living for—besides which, Mrs. Strictland sometimes furnishes her with a specimen of some new mode, in the shape of a cap or hat, which is always worn with peculiar triumph, as the present of that 'dear daughter, who has always so kindly appreciated the tenderness which she feels for her.'"

"Surely this world of fashion must have some strong attractions," said Rhoda, thoughtfully. "I wonder in what they consist?"

"You will soon see," returned Frances.

"Not soon," returned Rhoda; and the hint that I shall *not*, is the only pleasant trait in this unintelligible letter. —It seems, however, that I *must* take up my abode in Mr. Strictland's family; for with so much expressed kindness, upon what pretence could I refuse to do so? To-day will, however, decide

the matter; for I do assure you, let your father say what he will, I shall prefer any situation to being trampled upon."

"My dearest Rhoda," said Frances— "you forget a certain precept—a certain prescribed impartiality between the left and the right cheek."

"Pshaw!" said Rhoda. "A proverbial way of speaking: it could never be meant to be taken literally."

"It must have some meaning, however," said Frances; "and at the lowest will probably exclude the rejection of any situation which duty points out to us, from the motive of not being 'trampled on.'"

"I am sure that we owe ourselves a proper pride," said Rhoda.

"Pride is a vice," replied Frances, "and we can never owe a vice to any creditor whom we should wish to pay."

"In what then consists the dignity of human nature?" said Rhoda.

"In virtue," returned Frances; "and it is your virtue just now, to put on *your beautiful hat*, and prepare for your visit."

Rhoda followed the advice of her friend, and endeavoured to give her auxiliary all the advantage that she could, by a careful attention to every other part of her dress; being willing, how little soever she confessed it, even to herself, to make the first blow decisive.

Her heart beat with all the flutter of apprehension and doubt, when she entered the drawing-room at Strictland Hall. But the apprehension, the doubt, lasted only for a moment. Lady Elizabeth received her with a more than usual flow of kindness, and instantly introducing her to Mrs. Strictland—

"See here, our lovely relation," said she. "I can hardly expect, now you do see her, that you will forgive me for having withheld her so long from your

sight, though those poor eyes were so closed with the head-ach, that they could scarcely have looked upon her."

"Miss Strictland will, I am sure, do herself the justice to believe," said Mrs. Strictland, "that nothing but the most imperious necessity could have compelled me to have delayed for a moment the honour of her acquaintance; and I presume to hope, from her goodnature, as full an indemnification for my past mortification as she can possibly afford me."

Rhoda stood confounded by a flow of words which bewildered her understanding, and a politeness and respect so little anticipated. — But the consequence, which she seemed to derive from a reception so highly flattering, imparted a feeling of more than usual courage, and enabled her to reply, with an ease and politeness which perfectly corresponded with the impression, that the elegance and beauty of her person had already made on Mrs. Strictland.

Mrs. Strictland retained as much

beauty as had, perhaps, ever escaped the ravages of five and forty years; and this beauty was adorned by dress of the most delicate texture, and of a form dictated by the best taste. There was no youthful display that provoked an insidious comparison between the past and the present: — no ostentatious ornaments that might be supposed to attempt to supply, by splendor, what was lost to beauty.—All was simple, apparently unstudied and unthought of. The charms that were still revealed, won every beholder to wish that more had been exposed; and the indifference, with which they seemed to be regarded by the possessor, gave them a higher value in the estimation of every other person.

Rhoda thought that she had never seen any one at any age so charming; and to be thus lovely at five and forty, she considered as little less than a miracle.

The manners of Mrs. Strictland compleated the conquest that her beauty

had begun; and Rhoda had not been an hour in Mrs. Strictland's company, before she was ready to quarrel with herself for all the proud and resentful thoughts, which she had been so diligently cultivating for four days before.

"Was this a creature to fear?—Was Mrs. Strictland capable of one unkind thought?—Could she trample upon a dependant?—Could she fail in the softest, kindest sympathy?—Impossible!"

Rhoda absolutely hated herself for ever having suffered such an idea to enter her mind.

The hours seemed to be winged; and Rhoda was so charmed with her new friend, that she started with surprise and regret, when, at eleven o'clock at night, the carriage which was to convey her home, was announced.

"Is it possible?"—said Rhoda, "is it so late?"

"How obliging is this regret," said Mrs. Strictland, "and how sincerely do

I participate in it!—But, my dear young friend, we part only for a few weeks.—I am sure that I have your compassion for the unfortunate impediments that oblige me to deprive myself of your company in our tour. But time's flight is swift. If possible, I shall return this way to town, and we shall then travel there together; but if this cannot be, I shall take care that your journey is made with every accommodation, and before the month of November closes, I shall in any case again embrace you."

"I shall be most happy to rejoin you," said Rhoda.

"Well then, good night, my love," said Mrs. Strictland, taking both Rhoda's hands in hers, and kissing first one and then the other. — "Farewell — and think of the happy hours that await you in town."

Rhoda returned the pressure of Mrs. Strictland's hand with a grateful modesty—then made the adieu to the rest

of her relations, and returned to the vicarage, penetrated with admiration and delight.

Frances met her with impatient anxiety.

"Well, my dear Rhoda," said she.

"I am delighted!—I am enchanted!" replied Rhoda. "In the whole world there never was any thing so charming as Mrs. Strictland. How injurious have been my fears!"

"Indeed!" said Frances. "I rejoice to hear it!"—And it was no equivocal proof of the goodness of both the head and heart of Frances, that she spoke nothing but the strictest truth.

"Mrs. Strictland," said Rhoda, "must charm all who see her."

"And are the rest of the party equally charming?" asked Frances.

"I thought of nobody but Mrs. Strictland all day long," replied Rhoda. "Lady Elizabeth's sweetened honey makes me sick; and my good uncle, when he has shaken me by the hand, and

has called me his pretty niece, has nothing more to say;—but Mrs. Strictland, with as much sweetness as Lady Elizabeth, has a spirit—a turn of conversation, which must, I think, make her always a delightful companion."

"Well, but Mr. Strictland?" inquired Frances. "Oh, my cousin—my cousin Thomas.—Why, my dear, he is very silent—and very grave.—I therefore conclude that he is very wise;—but to tell the whole truth, I also suspect that he is a very churl.—He looked at me, from under his black eye-brows, scowled, and said nothing: but I could not withdraw my thoughts sufficiently from his lovely wife to care much about him. She is something that I never saw before—something of which I had not formed an idea—she does not flatter in words like Lady Elizabeth, but she makes one flatter one's self by a graciousness, a deference that leaves one no doubt of one's own consequence with her.—How I do wish that you knew her! you would so love her!"

Frances smiled.—" I should certainly love to be flattered," said she.

" I don't mean *that,*" replied Rhoda; " but such manners are a proof of goodness of heart, and sweetness of temper, qualities that every body must love."

" I can easily believe," said Frances, " that she is very engaging; but is not a few hours' conversation rather too short a period to enable us to judge of the heart and the temper?"

" You see her very soul in her eyes," replied Rhoda. " Her voice is music itself, and every word seems but to be the overflowing of her benevolent heart."

" You see, then, my dear Rhoda," said Frances, " how groundless were your fears: the prospect before you seems to be as fair as we can wish."

" It does, indeed!" returned Rhoda; " and most truly did my uncle say, that we are all equally dependant—that the difference is only in that on which we depend; and that the support, which he sought for me, was the natural support

due from the stronger branches of the family tree to the weaker."

This was the first time that Rhoda had mentioned her uncle since his death by any direct designation. "My best friend;"—"My all;"—"He, who is gone for ever;"—"He who never uttered falsehood;"—"The will to which I bend," and such figurative terms, were alone those by which she had seemed able to prevail with herself to point out a person, whose name and relationship to herself she seemed to regard as too sacred to be expressly spoken. The novelty did not pass unremarked by Frances, and the consequences, which she drew from it, were consolatory as to the restored happiness of her friend.

"Does Mrs. Strictland leave the Hall to-morrow?" said Frances.

"Oh, no! She stays till Wednesday."

"Then you go to her again to-morrow, I suppose?" said Frances.

"Why, no, no;—I believe not.— She did not say any thing about it.

Something was said of an engagement, but I certainly don't go, for she took leave of me."

Frances again made her own reflections. "Well, my dear Rhoda," said she, "now let us go to bed—it is a late hour for our sober family; and I am sure that, with such happy prospects before you, you will not want waking or sleeping visions that will make the night too short."

"Ah, my Frances," said Rhoda, throwing her arms around her friend, "but all these visions will be saddened by the image of our cruel separation.—Go where I will—be what I will, whom shall I love as well as I do you?"

The heart of Frances overflowed at her eyes.

"If you are happy, my dear Rhoda, I will teach myself even to *love* our separation: if you are not happy, return to us, and end it."

"Frances," said Rhoda, "your words do not flow with such a stream of friendly

eloquence, as pours from the lips of Mrs. Strictland; but yet you put them so together, as at once to move the heart and convince the reason. I am sure that you love me, and that you *will* love me in every circumstance—that you will love me whatever hat I wear."

Frances laughed.

"Come, come," said she; "let us put on our night caps, and put them on as becomingly as we can; for with all our philosophy, there is no denying but that the judgment waits upon the eye."

CHAP. XI.

"———We find
Who does a kindness, is not always kind."

Pope.

The next morning at breakfast, all Rhoda's pleasure, and all Rhoda's expectations were detailed to Mr. Wyburg.

He made many wise comments on the rashness of judging without knowledge; on the gratuitous torments that we allow the imagination to inflict; and on the duty of dependant beings to submit to circumstances, and to accept with thankfulness the portion of happiness that is dealt out to them.

Rhoda, who calculated pretty largely on the proportion that would fall to her lot, found nothing to except against in Mr. Wyburg's wisdom.

"My dear Sir," said she, "you speak

like an oracle—and I hope, that you will allow, that I act like a philosopher."

"Like a female philosopher," said Mr. Wyburg, with a smile.

"To be sure!" returned Rhoda. "I would not be that rigid robust thing, a male philosopher, for the world.—How I do wish that Mr. Ponsonby knew how calmly I am resolved to submit to my destiny!"

A transient blush crossed the cheek of Frances.

"Mr. Ponsonby," said she, "is not that rigid robust thing, which you need fear to resemble."

"Oh no," replied Rhoda. "His feelings quiver at every breath most delightfully—and I long to communicate to his heart the pleasure that mine feels at this moment."

"Pray, my dear," said Mr. Wyburg, "be contented with the pain that you have occasioned Mr. Ponsonby, and don't seek to give him pleasure."

Rhoda's brow became clouded.

"I thought," said she, resentfully, "that I had sufficiently explained myself on that subject—but it seems that I am to be for ever mistaken!—Mr. Ponsonby is not, *cannot* ever be more to me than a very dear friend; and *that* he shall be, and openly avowed to be, in spite of all the suspicions and misconstructions that mistake or malice may entertain or propagate."

"You will be sorry for those words, my dear Miss Strictland, when you come to reflect," said Mr. Wyburg, calmly.

"Oh, I am sorry for them now!" cried Rhoda. "My dear, my honoured Sir, forgive me!—How could I be so petulant! but indeed, indeed you must not think it possible that I can wish to engage any man's heart, so sensible as I am, that I have none to return—it would be baseness—it would be treachery—it is indeed an imputation that shocks me—that I cannot bear,"—said she, bursting into tears.

" Compose yourself, my dear," said Mr. Wyburg, " and be assured, that I never did impute such a design to you. But, however free you may be from the intention, you will not be innocent of the act, if you allow Mr. Ponsonby to believe that you regard him, as ' a very dear friend;' if you interest his feelings in all the fluctuating hopes and fears, pains and pleasures, that the liveliness of your sensations and the versatility of your taste expose you to."

" I cannot believe," said Rhoda, " that Mr. Ponsonby knows my heart so little, as to be led by the expression of the liveliest friendship, into the most remote hope of any more peculiar feeling—and where there can be no hope, there can be no disappointment—but I do not wonder that this should appear strange to you, Sir.--Mr. Ponsonby seems to be the only one who perfectly understands my character. He is aware, not only of the liveliness but of the depth of my feelings—and can understand how hopes and fears may fluctuate, without

betraying a versatility of taste. He has told me that he never entertained a hope; and I believe that the esteem, with which he honours me, is as free from the alloy of that selfish passion to which you allude, as is the friendship which I bear him, and which no consideration upon earth shall ever make me disavow."

"Keep, however, this in your mind, that there is a difference between you. Mr. Ponsonby has certainly a heart to bestow.—You say that you have not.—Remember that the state is unequal, and play your game not only honourably, but mercifully."

Mr. Wyburg, as he said the last words, withdrew; and Rhoda, looking round for Frances, found that she also was gone.

"How little," thought Rhoda, "does Mr. Wyburg know of the human heart; and how little does Frances think of any thing but domestic cares!—This it is to have a mind at ease!"

But the heart most at ease of the three, was certainly, at this moment, Rhoda's own. Her imagination transported her into those regions of magnificence and amusement, that Mrs. Strictland had, the evening before, painted in such glowing colours; and the description of which had, in Rhoda's estimation, given such spirit to her discourse.—Already she seemed familiar with the delights that had been promised her.—She seemed still to hear the mellifluous tones of Mrs. Strictland, breathing forth the more delicate adulation and the most refined sentiment.

"I shall be loved!—I shall be admired!—I shall be honoured!" said Rhoda. "But, misled heart!—" added she, recollecting herself, "shall I after all be happy?"

This question seemed to her to be fully answered in the affirmative, as she read, a few hours afterwards, a note from Mrs. Strictland, reiterating a thousand tender adieus, and repeating as

many promises of a speedy meeting, and an everlasting union.

There was, however, one question, which she had never thought of asking herself—what was the nature of that attraction, by which she had apparently so forcibly drawn towards her the admiration and even affection of an entire stranger, who, she had hitherto been led to believe, was not accustomed to step beyond the magic circle of selfishness? nor how it happened, that while the husband, bound to promote her happiness by the ties of blood, and the still stronger obligation of a promise, remained cold, gloomy, and repulsive; the wife, free from all such imperative motives, had come forward with a fresh benevolence and a flattering partiality, that seemed to indicate an entire forgetfulness of every interest but that of her new friend, and a delight in charms which she could not but be conscious must eclipse her own.

The solution of this enigma lay in the politics of the family.

Mrs. Strictland had, with her hand, given to Mr. Strictland a large fortune; which had opportunely fallen to her at the very moment when the waning of her charms had made her feel that beauty alone will not always secure an advantageous settlement in the world. The disproportion between the means and the expense, which had always prevailed at Strictland Hall, had occasioned that this fortune was nearly the whole of their present income, and the want of children rendered the enjoyment of it to Mr. Strictland, dependant upon the life of his wife.—Hence his desire to starve the present hour, that he might procure plenty for the future; and hence hers to enjoy the present at the expense of a future which she could never see. Ends so different necessarily produced means as contrary; and the perpetual struggle,

which was carried on between the husband and the wife, as to who should spend or save the most, made their domestic hours one perpetual scene of reproach and discontent. A companion, who would think with her, was therefore in itself highly desirable to Mrs. Strictland; and that youth and inexperience would enlist on the side of expense and amusement, was not to be doubted: but in Rhoda, Mrs. Strictland flattered herself that she should not only find a powerful ally in all her schemes of display and pleasure; but likewise so legitimate an end for pursuing them, as would at once confound Mr. Strictland's objections, and give her the honour and praise of the most generous and best tempered person in the world. Nor was she unaware that the introduction of more youthful beauty, would renew and prolong the flatteries and distinctions that had already begun to fall off from her declining charms; nor was she wholly insensible to the plea-

sure which attaches, in some minds, to manœuvring matrimonial advantages for others, when the game is up for themselves. If to these *inherent* motives for wishing to secure Rhoda as an inmate, be added the circumstance of that satisfaction which Mrs. Strictland always derived from whatever was disagreeable to her husband, whom she had made such only because no other offered more acceptable to the taste; we have the whole of those springs which had so briskly set in motion all Mrs. Strictland's powers of charming, in her first interview with Rhoda.

She had been told that she was pretty, and but for this information, she would never have consented to have received her into the house; but the expectation, which she had formed of her beauty, fell so much short of what she found the reality to be, that the moment she beheld her, she was at once surprised and delighted to find, how admirably she was suited to forward all the pur-

made another understand what that was from which she expected such a profusion of delight. It glistened, however, in her eye, and gave elasticity to every motion. An occasional letter from Mrs. Strictland, though consisting only of ten lines, indicating their route, threw her into raptures with the unbounded excellency and warm feelings of her new friend; and the protracted length of the tour was the only drawback on the pleasure.

Never did she remember to have passed so interminable an autumn; and her patience began to be put a little to the proof, when a sudden knocking at the house door one gloomy evening in the beginning of November, made her heart bound, and she exclaimed,

"That's from the Hall!—Mrs. Strictland is come!—I shall perhaps be gone to-morrow; and oh, my dearest Frances, how, how shall I bear to part with you?"

Frances, pale and trembling, was about to reply, when the door opened; and

there appeared—not the servant with a message—but—Mr. Ponsonby himself!

Frances's retreating blood rushed again to her cheeks, and Rhoda, flying with eager delight and out-stretched hand towards the unlooked-for visitor, cried out,

"How delighted I am to see you before I leave this dear place, where you were always so kind and good to me!"

Mr. Ponsonby raised the offered hand of Rhoda to his lips; but his own trembled, and his emotion deprived him of the power of utterance.

Mr. Wyburg's kind but calm reception restored his composure; and Frances, quietly holding out her hand, said, in a gentle voice,

"I am very glad to see you; and I hope we see you well."

"But why do we see you so unexpectedly?" said Mr. Wyburg.

"Business brings me here," said Mr. Ponsonby, with embarrassment;—"the distance, that divides us, has made me late."

" Well then," said Rhoda, " you must make us amends by staying longer."

" Mr. Ponsonby," said Mr. Wyburg, " knows that he can never stay too long in any house where I am master; unless he stays to his own inconvenience or detriment."

Rhoda felt the reproof—blushed, and was silent.

" If such were to be the limit of my stay, my dear Sir," returned Mr. Ponsonby, " I know not when you would get rid of me;—but just now let us not talk of parting.—I am sure Miss Wyburg will give me some tea; and let us, at least for this evening, forget that I am only a guest, where I had once a happy home."

" You are too young," said Mr. Wyburg, " to have a right, at present, to place all your happiness in home;—you must earn so great a blessing before you can enjoy it."

" What is there that I would not do to earn it?" said Mr. Ponsonby, casting an

eye-beam of affection on Rhoda; "and I am about to begin my labours. Perhaps, my dear Sir, you are not aware that I am on my road to Oxford."

"Not the *direct* road," said Mr. Wyburg, smiling. "But how is it? Is your destination in life fixed? Has the church or the law carried it?"

"The church," said Mr. Ponsonby, with something of a tremulous voice.

"The church!" exclaimed Rhoda. "Mr. Ponsonby, are you to be a parson?"

"Would you advise me otherwise?" said Mr. Ponsonby, with increasing confusion.

"I advise you!" said Rhoda, laughing. "Oh yes, I should make an admirable counsellor in such a matter. How should I settle the dispute between my Lady Theology, and my Lord Jurisprudence, who do not know even the fashion of their respective gowns?"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Ponsonby, "I know as little at present of either of them as you can do; but it is not the less ne-

when the eye and the mind were feasted, it were pardonable if the grosser wants of mortality were forgotten."

The evening passed in grave, or gay discourse, as Rhoda, or Mr. Wyburg took the larger share in it. Frances said little, and what she did say was rather as a moderator between the parties, who were not always in perfect unison, than as a principal in what was said. Mr. Ponsonby seemed scarcely to have eyes or ears for any one but Rhoda, whose restored cheerfulness, and glow of beauty, dazzled his senses, and gladdened his heart. As they parted for the night,

"Do you leave us to-morrow?" said Mr. Wyburg to Mr. Ponsonby.

"At some time in the day, I fear I must," said Mr. Ponsonby—"but if you will allow me, it shall not be an early one." Then in a low voice, to Rhoda, as he bade her good night, he added,

"May I hope for your attention for about ten minutes, when it is least inconvenient to you, at any time to-morrow?"

"Oh, at any time—at any moment," said Rhoda aloud; "but remember that I will have nothing to do in your grave debatings of how you are *to settle in life.*"

Mr. Ponsonby bowed, and smiled, and Frances said to her friend, as they retired,

"Dear Rhoda, how can you treat so lightly what seems to lie so heavily at Mr. Ponsonby's heart?"

"You would not have me treat that as a grave subject of debate, which is already determined," said Rhoda. "Don't you see that Mr. Ponsonby is foredoomed to be a parson?"

"And if he is—where is the harm of it?" said Frances.

"Harm!" returned Rhoda; "none in the world. I rather think it will be an useful experiment. We shall see whether there are any agreeablenesses of mind and manner that can stand out against the quizzical effects of parsonifying youth and gaiety."

"I see no such effects," said Frances,

gravely ;—" but do you suppose that the choice of his profession is the only subject, on which Mr. Ponsonby intends to consult you ?"

" I dare say he does not intend to consult me on any subject," said Rhoda.

" Why, then, does he wish to speak to you alone ?" said Frances.

" Probably to repeat the same fond tale that he told me, when last we parted," said Rhoda ; " and in spite of your father's scruples, I can really see no objections to granting him such an indulgence. He knows that I have no heart to give, and that if I had, I should not give it to him, while he has nothing to offer me in return but vows unsanctioned by the approbation of a father: he can therefore have no hope from me, and I cannot foresee any future evil in a little present kindness."

" But why should you have no heart to give ?" urged Frances.

" All my affections, beyond the calmness of friendship," returned Rhoda,

solemnly, "are buried in the grave of my uncle; and if they were not, my own sad existence reads me such a lesson against the indulgence of passion—of *indiscreet* passion, as steels my heart against every possible attack from that little saucy god, whom you seem to think so irresistibly powerful."

"That *I* think so powerful!" said Frances blushing, "I did not mean to say that, I am sure—but the instances that we have every day—"

"Of love and folly," interrupted Rhoda, "will not be swelled, I do assure you, by any measure of mine. The scene in that wretched hut where I first drew my breath is ever too present to my imagination, to allow me to be guilty of a folly, that might lead to a repetition of such miseries."

"But surely," said Frances, "love and folly are not one and the same.—May we not love wisely, and yet well?"

"If you mean as a general maxim, I suppose that it may be so," said Rhoda;

"but I spoke with reference to any danger which my kindness to Mr. Ponsonby might be supposed to involve, either to himself or me."

"Why," said Frances, timidly, "should there be any imprudence in suffering the merits of Mr. Ponsonby to have their natural effect on your heart?"

"Why!" said Rhoda. "Because I am pennyless, and he is poor."

"Mr. Ponsonby is not rich," replied Frances; "but neither will he be poor, if we restrict the sense of that word to a part of the modern comforts of life. She, who does not prefer the splendors of life to its happiness, may indulge a partiality for Mr. Ponsonby, without any impeachment of her discretion."

"But, my dear Frances," said Rhoda, "this *she* must then be endowed with a thousand *useful qualities* like your dear self; not be such a helpless waited upon thing as I am."

"At eighteen," said Frances, "we

may be almost any thing that we resolve to be."

"Well then, dearest friend," said Rhoda, throwing her arms round Frances's neck, "I will be the most grateful, and the fondest lover of you, that ever woman was to woman; but never will I entertain an atom of that sort of love, which might call for sacrifices. I should not be willing to make and exact duties which, perhaps, I should find it impossible to fulfil."

"If such a limited range of the affections be sufficient for your happiness," replied Frances, "the resolution is a wise one."

It might perhaps have been well for Mr. Ponsonby, if he too could have chosen the kind and measure of love that he would entertain; but on the very moment when he believed that he was about to act upon the wisest calculation of circumstances and consequences, he had probably less the power of calculation than he had ever had in his life.

Sleep had not once visited his eyes through the course of the hours destined to rest—these hours had been spent in the most depressing despair, and the most aspiring hope—in the ever fleeting, and ever changing visions of imagination; where in one moment he saw himself surrounded by all that could delight the taste, or gratify the affections; where love and fortune contended who should most distinguish him from his fellow mortals; and the next, he beheld nothing but images of disappointment, difficulty and distress.

Rhoda, on her entrance into the breakfast parlour, found him standing with his head bent over the chimney-piece, rather incapable of thinking than lost in thought.

"Mr. Ponsonby," said Rhoda, "what is the matter? Upon my word I scarcely know you under these grave casts: one would think that you had commenced parson already."

"I hate that word in your mouth,"

said Mr. Ponsonby: "tell me truly, my dear Miss Strictland, does it not convey to your imagination every thing that is disagreeable to your taste?"

"Oh! no," said Rhoda, "pray don't look grave because you think that I dislike parsons."

"I cannot look otherwise with the prospect of being any thing which you dislike," said Mr. Ponsonby.

"Well now, that's very foolish," said Rhoda: "what can it signify, whether I like the colour of your coat or no?"

"Provided it is only the colour of the coat," said Mr. Ponsonby, "I will allow that it does not much signify."

"But I really think that I could never dislike you," said Rhoda, "although you were to be as grave and as severe as our dear Mr. Wyburg."

"Oh! could I be but as kind and as good!" said Mr. Ponsonby, "my vows for eternity would be answered, however those for time might be disappointed."

"But, my good friend," said Rhoda, "pray let time and eternity go a little hand in hand. You and I are too young to leave this world quite out of our calculation."

"And too wise, I hope," said Mr. Ponsonby, "not to make the other the greater part of it."

"Spoken like Mr. Wyburg himself!" said Rhoda.

"Oh! my dear Miss Strictland," returned Mr. Ponsonby, "I see that you think me too grave; but my whole soul is in my present thought. On this hour, for aught I know, depends all the happiness of my future existence here, and hereafter. Whatever principle of good that I have, must be fixed or confounded by the gentle companion of my future life. Could I believe that this dear hand," said he, taking Rhoda's hand, "would condescend to be my guide, I should not fear going wrong."

"Surely I do not understand you," said Rhoda. "You know that I shall

never cease to be your friend; and you know that I can never be more."

"Do not fear," said Mr. Ponsonby, "that I come to insult you with offers of clandestine devotion; that I presume to hope for any favour which you may not do me the honour to avow. I come with the sanction of a parent, to deal explicitly with you—to tell you what I am—to ask from you what I must be.—Hear me with your wonted benignity; and oh, if possible, hear me with a favouring mind"

An emotion, never before felt, agitated Rhoda—she trembled.

"Well, Sir," was all that she said; her eye at the same time sinking under the ardent glance of Mr. Ponsonby's.

"That I love you, love you as my own soul," said Mr. Ponsonby, "I need not tell you—you must have seen it, in my silence—you must have heard it in every word—my forbearance—my presumption—my eager seeking of your company—my flying from your society,

all have told the same story—the story of a heart which beats but for you, and which breaks if you reject it. But, alas! what is all this to you? This heart perhaps is valueless in your eyes—or if you condescendingly incline to believe that it is not wholly unworthy of your endeavours to make it what you wish it; your prudence perhaps may tell you that you would make those endeavours to your own loss. I am not selfish enough to wish to combat that prudence; but should you think with me, that happiness depends more upon what we are, than on what we have, perhaps I have means to reconcile the scruples of prudence with the dictates of generosity.

"I am the eldest of five children, three brothers and two sisters; and I am the heir to an estate, which will do something more than supply all the comforts of life; but until it comes into my possession, I am the creature of my father's bounty, and my own industry.

"My brothers and my sisters are, as

they ought to be, his peculiar care while he lives, because he cannot extend that care as far as he could wish, beyond the period of his life. In that life too, so large a share of my happiness is bound up, that no pecuniary advantage can tempt me to contemplate its close without the sharpest pang—nor could the promotion of the higher interests of my heart fully compensate for a loss which can never be repaired. In speaking this language, I cannot fear that I shall be misunderstood by her, who knows but too well how to appreciate such a deprivation. But is there not an unpardonable presumption in offering to your acceptance an uncertain, and a protracted period (a period, that I cannot even wish to shorten) of narrow circumstances, without having been able to communicate to your heart any share in those affections, which would be sufficient, of themselves, to make my own happiness? Do not believe me to be guilty of this presumption:—only allow me to

endeavour to make myself acceptable to you; only permit me to hope that, if I can do so, you will not reject me because I am poor."

"If you had not been poor," said Rhoda, "I should not have heard you thus far. While I could have been an object of fear to your father, I would not have listened to you at all;—and for what purpose should I listen now?—Indeed, my good friend, it seems to me as if you were leading us both into a fool's paradise."

The smile, with which these words were uttered; the little monosyllable, *both*, conveyed a transport to Mr. Ponsonby's heart, which threw him into an extacy.

He did and said all that a happy lover can say and do upon such an occasion—his words were humble—his eyes were saucy, and as he ventured to press one of Rhoda's hands to his heart, he said, "may I now be permitted to consult with you on my prospects in life?"

"As supposing that I shall share them, my good sir?" said Rhoda. "Pray don't take me into your confidence upon any such supposition."

"Well then," said the enraptured lover, "let it be as a friend that I consult you—as a cool reasoning friend—as one not interested in the event."

"Perhaps you may find that nearer the truth than I see that you are inclined to believe," said Rhoda; and she said it with a tone and manner, that instantly shut in the sun-shine, which the moment before had illuminated the countenance of Mr. Ponsonby.

Rhoda saw her power, and was merciful. "Well," said she, "what is this mighty question? Does it still refer to the fashion of the gown?"

"I wish not to trouble you," said the grieved and half angry lover, "on a matter which is indifferent to you."

"Oh, man, man!" said Rhoda, "how severely did you look just now!—And now you want me to say that it is not

indifferent to me—or what further sacrifice to your vanity must I make?"

"To my vanity *none*," said Mr. Ponsonby, fervently—"to my affection perhaps I ask too much."

"Too much in asking my advice," said Rhoda: "there is nothing costs so little."

"My dearest Rhoda," said Mr. Ponsonby; "could I believe that you do not dislike the profession of a clergyman, I should certainly prefer it to every other. My inclinations decidedly adopt it, and the prospect of the early possession of a valuable living certainly enlists prudence on the same side."

"Let us see, however, what is to be said on both sides," said Rhoda. "While the fashion of crops continues, the law and the church are much the same to the eye. The coat, I believe, must generally be black in both cases—and a wig is as indispensable an appendage to a judge, as a bishop.—Really I think the matter is quite equal.

Shall we toss up—heads, law—tails, church?"

"Is this a way of telling me, that you are neither for me, nor my profession!" said Mr. Ponsonby.

"It is a way of telling you that I don't like grave faces, nor grave debates; that I think you alone can determine in such a case; and that if you can make me like you, I shall like you just as well as a country parson, as if you were my lord chancellor."

"Dearest Rhoda!" said Mr. Ponsonby, and more he would have said had not the door just then opened, and Mr. Wyburg, followed by Frances, made his appearance.

To the acute observation of Mr. Wyburg there was no farther information necessary as to the kind of conversation which he had interrupted, than that which the looks of the conversers betrayed.

Rhoda's eye sunk under the penetrating glance of Mr. Wyburg, while the erect mien and brilliant eye of Mr.



Ponsonby, shewed that he did not believe he had been speaking in vain. To Mr. Wyburg he was affectionate and communicative, even beyond his usual manner. He expatiated on the course of studies that he was about to enter upon, sought advice and information, conversed on his prospects in life, detailed his hopes, and entered minutely into all the circumstances of advantage that attended the living which was one day to be his.

During this conversation the two ladies were equally silent. Rhoda was too conscious to speak; and from some motive, known only to herself, Frances seemed as little disposed to open her lips, as was her friend. But when Mr. Ponsonby mentioned, as the circumstance of his future residence which of all others made it acceptable to him, that it was not ten miles from the very spot where they were all at that moment assembled, Frances started—looked up, and meeting Mr. Ponsonby's eye, has-

tily withdrew her own; scalded her fingers by over-turning her tea; laughed at her own awkwardness, and betrayed how distant were her thoughts from the objects before her, by offering Rhoda bread and butter from an empty plate.

"Pray, Frances," said Rhoda, "what are you thinking of?"

"It is plain I am not thinking at all," said Frances, and resumed her composure.

"You did not, I believe, hear Mr. Ponsonby say that he is likely some time to be our neighbour," said Mr. Wyburg.

"I am very glad to hear it now," returned Frances. Mr. Ponsonby made an acknowledging bow; and Rhoda, to whom the conversation was uneasy, rose hastily from the table, saying "that it was the longest breakfast she had ever known in her life."

"You must pardon me," said Mr. Ponsonby, "if I have endeavoured to prolong it—for when the breakfast finishes, I must go."

"And whenever you go, may God's blessing go with you!" said Mr. Wyburg.

"And will not my two fair friends say 'amen' to that sweet prayer?" asked Mr. Ponsonby.

They bowed assentingly; and Rhoda said,

"Oh yes, pray take my blessing with you, and remember to repay it a thousand-fold when you are a bishop."

Mr. Ponsonby made his adieus; Mr. Wyburg withdrew to his studies, and the two ladies were left alone together.

The frank promptness of Rhoda's disposition was never at a loss before. Her heart was full; she longed to unburthen it to her friend, but words seemed to be denied her. She opened her lips, and closed them again, not exactly knowing what it was that she was about to have said. Frances relieved her:—she said with a smile,

"Are you still of the opinion, that

love and prudence are irreconcileable foes?"

"Oh, my dear Frances!" exclaimed Rhoda. "Would to heaven that I were never to stir from this dear spot!—How I dread and hate the thoughts of going to London!"

"This is a very sudden change," returned Frances. "To what am I to impute it?"

"Why, what can I learn there?" said Rhoda. "What habits can I form in that place, which will be suitable—that will fit me—" she stopped.

"For the wife of Mr. Ponsonby," said Frances, with something of sadness in her tone.

"Not absolutely *that*," returned Rhoda; "for I am almost sure that I shall never be his wife; and I have as good as told him so—but I mean, how should I learn in such a society as that into which I am going, to be either an useful or a reasonable creature?"

"Because this is a lesson that we may

learn in any society," replied Frances, "either by example, or warning.—If you live with those who are reasonable and useful, be like them—if the contrary, by seeing what to avoid, you will learn what to pursue."

"Oh my little industrious bee!" said Rhoda; "but who like you can extract honey from every flower—the bitter equally with the sweet?—Do you not know that I am like an unballasted vessel? My sails spread, my streamers flying—away I go with wind and tide, no matter whither. If storms arise, I bilge, and go to the bottom."

"You would not have me believe that this is your true character," said Frances; "and if you think it is so, I earnestly intreat that you will endeavour to correct it."

"It is in order to correct it, that I so much wish I was never to stir from under your wing, my dear; for there I am sure that I am safe: and I am persuaded, say what you will, that London

is the worst place in the world for me to reside in. I dread its glitter. I am conscious that it may dazzle and confound what clearness of vision and rectitude of thought I *do* possess."

"A consciousness of your danger will be your best security," replied Frances; "and there is one lesson that, I believe, you may learn there better than any where else—a command over yourself. The rules of good breeding, I apprehend, allow very little of the real feelings of the heart to be seen."

"Then," said Rhoda, "I shall be suffocated. I could as soon breathe over a pan of charcoal, as exist where I must not say what I think, and act as I feel."

"I am afraid that is what we must not always do, even in the pure air of the country," replied Frances, "where you seem now so desirous to remain."

"I was always desirous to remain in the country," said Rhoda. "You know how that was;—and I am now more de-

sirous than ever, and for very good reasons, I think."

"No doubt," replied Frances; "but are there not also good reasons on the other side?—Dearest Rhoda, say what you will, I see that you will one day be the wife of Mr. Ponsonby: at this very moment you design to be so, and under that impression you fancy that you should like nothing so well as to remain in the shade and solitude of Byrhley, sacrificing all the motives for personal action to the anticipation of future duties, to which perhaps you may never be called."

"No," said Rhoda, "that is not the case; but I *do* think, that if I am to be a country parson's wife, I am more likely to learn the duties of that character under this roof, than under that of Mrs. Strictland."

"You are to be the wife of a gentleman," returned Frances, "who to the dignified and elegant accomplishments that ought ever to justify the name,

must add, not only all the charities which constitute human nature, but all the duties that are in common to every Christian, and all those which ought to distinguish the teacher of Christianity."

"And do you think, my dear Rhoda, that the help-mate for such a man will be best trained in the constant round of merely household cares, and the society of a few ignorant cottagers' wives and children? No, my friend; the wife of Mr. Ponsonby ought to be his companion, not his house-keeper. She should be able to appreciate his talents, and to gratify him by her own—to grace his drawing-room, as well as to regulate his table—to personify the very virtue in his house, which he describes from his pulpit—to be, indeed, only his softer, gentler self. Go then, my Rhoda, take the situation which your birth, and the will of Providence appoints you: there you will learn all that will adorn life, and may learn all that dignifies it—you will alone have yourself to blame, if amid the variety of examples

before you, you chuse the evil, and neglect the good."

"Upon my word, Frances," said Rhoda, "I think you had better be this same *nonpareille* of a wife yourself. I know nobody else who can fill up the outline which you have so ably sketched; and I am sure that if the Sunday's sermon should not be ready on the Sunday morning, no one could supply the deficiency so well as yourself."

Frances shaded her eyes with her hands for a moment, and made no answer.

"And so, then, you will be glad that I should leave you?" said Rhoda.

"*No!*" returned Frances, with emphasis—"I shall be *very* sorry."

"There is one art, or science, call it which you will," said Rhoda, "that I am sure I could learn here better than elsewhere, and that is the art of speaking truth in the manner most convincing—and this would be a main article in

my powers of assisting a teaching, preaching husband."

"Well, but," said Frances, "we must act as well as preach; and I really can be idle no longer."

"I much fear," said Rhoda, as she sauntered into the garden, "that I love the idleness of life full as much as its business."

Rhoda's mind, always governed by the impulse of the moment, had now taken a new turn, and she dreaded a summons to London, as much as she had before desired it.

The ardent and manly passion of Mr. Ponsonby had called into life those dormant affections of which she had always asserted herself to be incapable; and the picture, which Frances had drawn of what his wife ought to be, had excited her ambition to become that very model of perfection.

In the superior sense, and exemplary virtue of Mr. Wyburg—in the gentle

manners of Frances—and in that mass of useful and elegant information which is supposed to be peculiarly adapted to the female character, in which she knew that her friend excelled, her good sense assured her, that she would find the best assistants towards forming herself into what she now so ardently desired to be; while the leisure and retirement of the situation would allow of the indulgence of those new-born feelings, that were becoming so delicious to her, and in the gratification of which she now supposed all her future happiness to consist. Hence she spoke and thought only of her regret that she must leave Byrhley at all, and of her apprehension that every coming day would bring the summons to do so.

Frances, who anticipated, in her separation from Rhoda, the loss of a companion in whose society she delighted, and of a friend, whom she most warmly and sincerely loved, partook very cordially of these regrets and apprehensions; but

her steadier mind and more regulated feelings forbade her to give way to an endless lamentation, which lessened the power of resisting, rather than diminished the weight of the burthen.

Nor was she blind to the advantages that Rhoda might derive from a change of situation—advantages which she lost no opportunity of pointing out to her. While judging rather from a knowledge of her own character, than that of her friend's, she was less aware of the evils and dangers to which she was about to be exposed, than she would have been, if her knowledge of the world had been greater, or her confidence in the intellectual and moral qualities of Rhoda less.

She knew that a harvest was about to be opened to her, from whence all that was valuable *might* be reaped. How then could she believe, or fear, that the object of her admiration and love would gather only tares!

CHAP. XIII.

> "What matter where, if I be still the same,
> And what I should be?"
>
> *Milton.*

A FORTNIGHT had now passed since the visit of Mr. Ponsonby, and Rhoda's mind began to experience some little change of feeling.

Something like a mortifying fear that she was forgotten by Mrs. Strictland, had begun to make itself felt. It is true that she still wished to remain where she was, but she did not the less feel the humiliation of being neglected. She would have been glad to have refused, but she wished to be solicited. She did not foresee that even the solicitation would unite the bitterest sensations of wounded vanity, with the better emotions of deep regret for her separation from her friends.

One morning before she had left her room, a servant from the Hall brought her a letter from Mrs. Strictland, inclosed in a note from Lady Elizabeth, containings these words:—

"The happy day is at length arrived, my dear Rhoda. I congratulate you, but I condole with all your friends, and feel, perhaps, more for myself, than for any of them.

"My carriage shall come for you tomorrow morning, and convey you to the coach. I shall send it early, that you may come by the Hall, and give Sir William and myself the melancholy pleasure of bidding you adieu. Pray make our best compliments acceptable to the Wyburgs."

"To the coach!" repeated Rhoda; and she eagerly tore open Mrs. Strictland's letter, to see how such a mode of conveyance having been appointed for her, was accounted for. Thus Mrs. Strictland wrote:—

"My sweet young friend would indeed pity me, if she knew in what a *démêlé* I have been engaged with Mr. Strictland. I had *so* set my heart on coming for you myself, and having the pleasure of travelling with you to town, that I might have enjoyed the pretty wonders which will so light up every beautiful feature in your lovely face, as the marvels of *our* world open upon you!— But it was not to be! Mr. Strictland is *le maître*, as you, my dear, will some day find that all men will be. He says the thing is impossible; so I have nothing to do but to submit; and in fact, this arrangement will only a little delay my pleasure, and be no drawback on yours.

"I hope you will make your journey with every convenience. Mr. Strictland thinks it will be best, as you have no man-servant, that you should travel in the mail, as the safer conveyance for two females, than a hack-chaise; and in point of respectability and comfort, you

know, my love, there is no difference. I send my own maid to attend you, and my carriage shall meet you at Barnet; for I would not have you come to my house in any kind of a hack. Pray take care of yourself, and come to me in good looks, and good spirits, and believe me, ever your's,

"WILHELMINA STRICTLAND.

"Mr. Strictland has requested the favour of Sir William to permit his carriage to take you to the town through which the mail passes in its way to London, which I hope will make your journey easier, and more agreeable."

On perusing this letter, Rhoda burst into tears. She sincerely believed that they flowed wholly from her approaching separation from a place and friends so dear to her; but a more accurate investigation of the human heart would have found that they sprung not from *one* source alone; that mortification was mingled with sorrow, and that she was

not only grieved at being unable to stay, but vexed with the mode in which she was to go.

She flew to Frances.

"The summons, the dreaded summons is come at last," said she, "and in such a form!"

"Mrs. Strictland does not come for you?" said Frances."

"Oh no—she sends her maid, and I am to travel in the mail," said Rhoda. "Could you have believed, Frances, that this was the mode of conveyance she meant, when she said that she would take care my journey should be made with every accommodation?"

"I believe," said Frances, "that the conveyance is very eligible; and as you will have a female attendant, I hope you will not find it uncomfortable."

"And I shall find it very gentlewoman-like too, I suppose," returned Rhoda. "Mrs. Strictland does not seem to forget her own dignity, however she may neglect mine. See," said she, giving Frances

the letter, " how carefully she provides against the disgrace of having a hired carriage seen at her door."

" I dare say," returned Frances, " that is not the meaning. It is for your sake she does this;—and perhaps customs and forms, which we know nothing of, may make it proper that it should be so. The thing itself is probably as indifferent to Mrs. Strictland as to you, or me—but I can easily understand that there may be decorums necessary to be observed in the great world, of which we, who inhabit the little world, have no notion."

" Oh that I were never to quit that dear little world!" exclaimed Rhoda. " Such a specimen as I have just now received of the manners of the greater, gives me little inclination to enter it."

" Let not such a trifle disturb you, my dear Rhoda," said Frances. " If you think that Mrs. Strictland ought to be above such considerations, ought not you to be so too?"

" True, true," replied Rhoda—" I did

not think of that;—and, alas! what does it signify how I go, if I must go from you?"

Frances pressed the hand of Rhoda between her's—but her heart was too full for speech.

They went together to communicate to Mr. Wyburg Rhoda's approaching departure. She gave him Mrs. Strictland's letter, and narrowly watched his countenance to learn, if possible, what effect the circumstance, which had so much discomposed her, would have upon him. The near calculating spirit of Mr. Strictland certainly did not escape his observation; but he was too prudent to take notice of it.—He returned the letter to Rhoda, only saying,

"In losing you, my dear Miss Strictland, Frances and I shall suffer, as if we lost a limb; but the exchange will be so much to your advantage, that we will endeavour not to lament it. My dear young friend, be good, and be happy."

"Oh how shall I be either, when separated from you, my two dear friends!" said Rhoda, bursting into tears. "Here, and here alone, I can be happy—and your example, I feel, can make me good!"

"We may be good every where," said Mr. Wyburg, mildly. "You, if you please, may be pre-eminently good; but to be so, you must learn to act from principle, rather than from impulse."

"Oh, if I could hear your warning voice, my respected friend, every day," cried Rhoda—"if I could see the bright example of my Frances every hour, I might in time be less unworthy of your kindness than I now am;—but who will henceforth recall my wandering imagination, which so often leads my actions astray?—Where, but at Byrhley, shall I find the prototype by which to form my character?"

"You have not been left so unfurnished by your beneficent Creator, my dear Miss Strictland," returned Mr. Wy-

burg, "as to justify these misgivings. You have in your own hands the means of being all that is praiseworthy; but I should be unjust to the trust reposed in me by my lost friend, if, in this impressive moment, I did not warn you against the vanity which, amidst all this apparent doubt of your own strength, makes you insensible where your real weakness lies; if I did not caution you against that quick resentment of pain and pleasure—of benefit and injury, which marks your character. To *do* no wrong, is but half your task—you must learn to bear it—your natural disposition will make the first easy to you;—nothing will enable you to do the other but a lively conviction of the truth of that religion which you profess, and a due sense of the tremendous consequences of violating *any* of its laws."

"Oh," said Rhoda, hanging in weeping imbecility on the shoulder of Mr. Wyburg, "let me stay here—here only

can I be safe,—the world for me is too potent an enemy!"

"The world is every where, my dear," replied Mr. Wyburg: "it is in your own bosom. Your trials and temptations will not be the same, but they will not be more irresistible in London than at Byrhley. It is the regulation of the heart—it is the controul of the temper that must make your praise, or your condemnation in either place. The decorum, that is only induced by the example of those around us, is not virtue. Good manners are not good morals. You must learn to distinguish them, and to act upon the distinction—and then, but not till then, you may be amiable, but you can never be virtuous."

"But here, my revered instructor," said Rhoda, "here I should see them united—in copying one, I should learn the other.—Where I am going, I fear there is no connection between what ought to be inseparable."

"The fear is uncandid," replied Mr. Wyburg. "Human nature is the same every where. The Christian rule is the same in all places:—make it the rule of your life, and you may be as safe in the motley scenes on which you are about to enter, as in the uniform path which you seem so desirous not to quit."

"But are there not peculiar difficulties—peculiar temptations in the world, to which I am going?" urged Rhoda.

"Peculiar ones, undoubtedly," said Mr. Wyburg---"but not greater, perhaps, than those which assail a more private station. The criterion of virtue *is the performance of duty upon principle.* Look around you, and tell me whether you see this criterion observed in a more exemplary manner in these retired scenes, than you may reasonably suppose it may be amidst the bustle of the world. Do we leave the worldlings behind us in the race of pride, of envy, of self-love, of eagerness for the things of this life?—Are we more candid, less

censorious, more meek-spirited? Is there on us any distinctive mark by which it might be known that we awake each morning to all the wonders of a beneficent Creator, and sink each evening to rest, with no other protection than this superintending Providence?--Alas! my young friend, nothing of this is the case. As a species man is the same in the cell of the Anchorite, and the circle of a monarch;—as an individual he differs—be it the care of each, that the difference is on the side of virtue."

"But surely," persisted Rhoda, "there are some situations more favourable than others to virtue—situations, where we may be what we ought to be with less difficulty, with less sacrifices than it will cost us in other circumstances."

"I do not dispute that there are," said Mr. Wyburg—"but we have seldom the choice of our situations. Some paramount duty fixes our place of action. It is your own case—and is there any thing in the situation to which you are

going, that should make it so particularly difficult to you?—It is exactly that to which you were born—and therefore that to which we may say, you were by your Creator particularly called. Have you not been fitted for it by the education which you have received, by the company which you have kept? Will you not be instructed in the duties of it by one of your own family, who has practised them, and protected by another, who is the natural guardian of its honour? Will you not be surrounded by all the decorums, the decencies of life? Will not the language which you hear be that of modesty—the manners which you see be those of refinement—keeping as it were all that is ugly or offensive even from your very view? I must suppose that this is the case in the society to which you are going. If I am mistaken, the fountain of morals is poisoned at its source, and the farther we recede from the spring, the better;—but I will

not believe this; and then where will be your difficulties? They will lie in your own heart,—in your own temper; and there they would lie, were you never to stir from under my eye—never to be removed from the example of my good girl"—laying his hand affectionately on that of Frances—"never to move in a wider circle than the compass of this diminutive parlour.—Remember *this*, my dear Miss Strictland—watch over *yourself*, and all will be well. If you deviate from the path which your sense and your principle tell you is the right one, transfer not the blame from yourself to the circumstances in which you are placed."

Rhoda had nothing to reply—she wept in silence—she felt the whole of the responsibility with which Mr. Wyburg had so forcibly charged her, and shrunk from the weight of it.

"Recollect yourself, my dear," said Mr. Wyburg. "Endeavour to see things

as they are—alas! there will still be enough to afflict us all—for we *must* part!"

"And *must* we?" said Rhoda.

"But we part only for a time," said Mr. Wyburg; "and we are not without prospects, which, if realized, may unite us almost as one family, for the rest of our lives."

"Ah, my dear Sir!" said Rhoda, anxiously; "but when I may not be able to weather the storm that awaits me, how shall I dare look forward to the harbour to which you allude?"

"Let the thoughts of that harbour," said Mr. Wyburg—"since upon such subjects it seems young ladies are only to be spoken to in metaphors—call forth all your efforts. When we have you once safe amongst us again, the relation of past dangers will but heighten present pleasures;—and now, my dear, cheer up your spirits—make the necessary preparations for this regretted separation, and let the intervening hours be as

little painful as the circumstances will allow."

The two friends withdrew, that they might comply with as much of this advice as they could; but their power extended not beyond that which could not be neglected, and the work was so often interrupted by the tears and lamentations of both, that it proceeded very slowly. Mr. Wyburg had the pain of meeting his companions at dinner more afflicted, and less able to controul their feelings, than when he had parted from them. He knew, however, too well, the weakness of youth when new to sorrow, to be surprised or displeased, and rather strove to divert, than to contend with their grief.

Frances was soon able to resume her self-command, and Rhoda to smile through her tears; and the evening was passed with a kind of melancholy satisfaction. But none of the three could forget for a moment that it was the last which they were to spend together for a course of time, which as it was indefi-

nite, appeared to the younger two endless also.

The simple "good night" sounded like an eternal farewell, and each turned from the other to conceal an emotion which none could suppress.

Frances and Rhoda could not prevail with themselves to separate through the night;—it was spent in reiterated assurances of the tenderest affection—in references to the past, and anticipations of the future; and the morning found them pale and exhausted, yet dreading nothing so much as the moment which was to put an end to a state of mind that could not have been continued much longer without serious injury to both.

The moment so much dreaded came! —the carriage was at the door!—the friends must part!

"Oh never forget me!" said Rhoda, throwing her arms round Frances.

"We can neither of us forget!" said Frances—"the thing is impossible!"

"Forget not yourself, my dear Miss

Strictland," said Mr. Wyburg, "and this hour of pain will be but the prelude to years of happiness."

"Farewell!—Oh farewell!" said each. It was all that they could say; and Rhoda, hurried into the carriage by Mr. Wyburg, thought that the charm of life was flown for ever!

CHAP. XIV.

"Her tongue
Dropt manna, and could make the worse appear
The better reason."

Milton.

ABSORBED in her feelings, Rhoda adverted not to the figure which she was about to present to the eye of Lady Elizabeth—to that eye, that never penetrated beyond the surface, nor saw "the visage in the mind."

"Good heavens, my dear!" exclaimed she, the moment that she beheld Rhoda, "What's the matter?—What eyes are these?—How pale, how neglected you look!—Is it *so* that you hope to conciliate the affections of Mrs. Strictland?"

"I hope," said Rhoda, the repressed tears streaming again down her cheeks, "that Mrs. Strictland will not love me less, for a proof that I can love her!"

"Pooh!—nonsense!"—said Lady Elizabeth, "we are not talking so much of loving, as pleasing; and I can assure you, that Mrs. Strictland does not approve of romance; and she will think you very ungrateful, if she have reason to believe that you come to her reluctantly."

"How can I come otherwise," said Rhoda, "when I leave my earliest, my most tried friends?"

"Upon my word, Miss Strictland," replied Lady Elizabeth, "I did not expect this from you, and I tremble for the consequence."

"Oh pray don't misunderstand me," said Rhoda, still weeping, for at this moment all irascibility of temper was subdued. "I am not insensible to the offered kindness of Mrs. Strictland; but neither can I be so to that which I have experienced from those on whom I have no natural claim for kindness; and at this instant my heart is half-broken by our separation."

" A half-broken heart," returned Lady Elizabeth, " is but a poor return for the prompt affection that you have experienced from one, upon whom, however you may consider the matter, you have in fact no natural claim—but for whom, those claims which you may imagine so strongly grounded on nature, a word which I profess not to understand, would have been unattended to."

Rhoda's heart began to swell.

" If you think so, madam," returned she, " perhaps it would be best that I should proceed no farther."

" The best thing that you can do, my dear," said Lady Elizabeth, softening her tone, " is to wipe your eyes, adjust your hair, and look pleased and gay."

" These are manners," said Rhoda to herself, " but they are not morals."

Sir William entered at that moment to take his share in the farewell-scene with Rhoda.

" Why, what now, my pretty niece ?" said he, " What's become of the roses

in your cheeks?—What have you done with your eyes?"

"What, indeed!" said Lady Elizabeth; "but the less that is said the better. Come, you shall take some refreshment, and then be off, or you will be too late for the coach. We shall find luncheon in the next room."

But Rhoda could not eat; and if she had lingered with a fond regret at Byrhley, as though every moment, that she could continue there, added something to the value of existence, she thought, on the contrary, that every instant, which she remained at the Hall, detracted something from what she owed to the undivided remembrance of the friends whom she had left, and the dignity of her own character.

The ceremonies of being urged to eat, and those of her refusal to do so, being passed, she took a cold farewell of Sir William and Lady Elizabeth, who on their sides seemed as little to regret her departure, and followed by Mrs.

Strictland's maid, she returned to the carriage.

Here she resigned herself to the tyranny of her own thoughts; and with an increased bitterness of reflection on the scene which had just passed, she dwelt on the distinction between flattery and friendship.

"The flatterer can but throw in his mite to the overflowings of prosperity," thought she—"the friend is made for adversity."

Yet Rhoda was not, perhaps, willing to forego either the one or the other; and the disparaging observations, that Lady Elizabeth had made on her figure, certainly added something to the forlornness of mind which the separation from her dear Wyburgs had occasioned. This feeling was still farther increased, as she stepped into the mail; but it was not long before every other sensation—every other thought was swallowed up in the overwhelming sorrow of an ardent heart, divided for the first time from the only

human beings to which it was genuinely attached.

So entirely did she abandon herself to her sorrow, that neither the well-meant endeavours of her attendant, nor the newness of every object around her, could engage her attention for a moment. She saw only the beloved scenes of Byrhley—she heard only the farewell sounds of her lost friends; and she arrived at Barnet so much exhausted, that it was fortunate this was her appointed place of rest.

The civil, and even good-natured assiduity of the servant to mitigate her grief, and to contribute to her accommodation, began to be not wholly without effect. She took the refreshment which she prescribed, retired early to bed, and arose the next morning, if not wholly recovered either in looks or spirits, yet so much changed from what she had been the evening before, that the woman complimented her on both, in a strain which plainly shewed that she was not

accustomed to find the tone of adulation unwelcome to the auditor.

"My lady will be so pleased to see you look so well, madam," said she. "I would not for a hundred pounds that Mrs. Strictland had seen you last night—but to-day!—I am sure, I don't wonder that she should talk so much of you, madam, as she does to every body she sees."

Rhoda did not quite like this familiarity. Her taste in flattery was yet delicate; and she was more offended by the liberty taken by a dependant, than gratified by the homage paid to her beauty.

She was silent and reserved; inquired whether Mrs. Strictland's carriage was arrived, and expressed an impatience to be gone.

This impatience was soon complied with; and as Rhoda's mind was more disengaged than it had been the day before, she now began to look around

her, and to consider the features of the new world on which she was entering.

To an eye unaccustomed to any greater assemblage of houses than what composed the small market-town, near which she had hitherto resided, the whole space between Barnet and London appeared to be a continued street; and when she first looked down upon that immense capital, she was lost in astonishment. But it was astonishment unmingled with delight.

The thick and dense atmosphere, which was spread before her eyes, disgusted her; it seemed to deprive her of one of her senses: while, on the contrary, the scents, which soon assailed her on every side, left her no doubt but that she had preserved her power of smell uninjured.

"Oh how unlike the country in all respects!" said she. "Every gale there is perfume. My eye can there discover

every object. Here I smell too much, and cannot see at all !"

Nor was she better satisfied, on her first entrance into the streets.

" Is this the magnificence of London?" said she. " What poverty! what dirt! what rudeness!"

" Oh, madam," said the servant, " you see nothing of London yet. Nobody but the vulgar live here:—when you see more you will be delighted."

" I have rather seen too much," said Rhoda ; but on turning into Oxford-street, she thought so no longer.

" Is it possible!" said she. " Can any thing so fine be so near a neighbour to every thing that is mean?---What breadth! --what length!---the shops!---Oh I never saw any thing so splendid!—so beautiful!"

" Oh, madam, you will see much finer and prettier things than you see here," said the experienced guide. And Rhoda thought every step they advanced, that nothing could be more true.

Every new object effaced the admiration excited by the last, and she said, as she stopped at Mrs. Strictland's door,

"If the very shops display such riches and elegance, what shall I not find in the residence of a person of Mrs. Strictland's taste?"

But Rhoda had arrived in Grosvenor-square in the first days of December, when, notwithstanding the multitudes which she had seen in the streets, the waiting-woman assured her, that "there was not a soul in town;" and of course, there existed not a motive with Mrs. Strictland to exhibit any proofs of that taste, which she considered as the most enviable distinction in life.

Rhoda descended from the carriage with a mingled sensation of expected pleasure, and of timidity, that made her heart beat, as she followed the footman up stairs.

"Surely," thought she, "Mrs. Strictland will be as glad to see me, as she appeared sorry to part with me."

Mrs. Strictland, however, was not in the room into which Rhoda had been shewn; and before she made her appearance, Rhoda had leisure to contemplate the splendour with which she expected to be surrounded.

But what was her astonishment when she beheld herself in an apartment, which had more the appearance of an upholsterer's warehouse, than the drawing-room of a person of fashion!

Every article of furniture was carefully papered up; and from the profusion in which they were heaped one upon another, they seemed rather to be designed for sale than use. The morning was raw and cold: she approached the fire-place, and saw with dismay, that it contained no fire—her thoughts flew back to Byrhley.

"Oh the comforts of that dear place!" said she. But she had no farther time to pursue her reflections, for Mrs. Strictland entered at the moment.

"My dear young friend, I am de-

lighted to see you," said she. "I hope I see you well;---but you look pale. Are you starved? Or has that odious mail-coach shaken you to pieces? Mr. Strictland is the most unpardonable of creatures. But come, shall we light the fire, or will you come with me to my little boudoir? We seldom light a fire in this room till evening, for there is not a human being in London, so there's no use in it."

Rhoda declared her readiness to repair to the boudoir, and there, in a little closet of about ten feet square, she found both fire and accommodation, and felt the expectation revive, of finding this splendid mansion not so wholly devoid of comforts, as its first aspect had made her apprehend.

Mrs. Strictland having placed herself in an easy chair, and having raised her feet almost to an horizontal posture, by the means of an embroidered footstool,

"Now, my dear Rhoda," said she, "the first thing that we shall have to

do, will be to look over your wardrobe. Of course there will be much to be set to rights---many additions to be made, and arrangements to be agreed upon. We must deal as well as we can with Mr. Strictland. He either will not, or cannot comprehend that no trifle will dress a young lady, who ought always to appear to the best advantage. He has signified to me that his house and his table are open to you; but that the paltry modicum, which you have inherited from your uncle, must provide all your other expenses. The thing is impossible; but don't make yourself uneasy. I shall be able to manage the matter to your satisfaction. We must both, however, have the air of economizing wherever you are concerned; and I give you this hint, that you may be ready, from the very first, to follow my lead whenever occasion calls for it.

"I should hope, madam," said Rhoda, "that no occasion will call for any thing like duplicity; and indeed I am quite of

Mr. Strictland's opinion, that the income of my little fortune will be sufficient for my personal expenses: it would have supplied *every thing* I should have wanted in the country."

"My dear child," returned Mrs. Strictland, "how can you know any thing about the matter?—Your gloves and your ribbons will consume such an income; and do you think that I would consent to be accompanied by one whose appearance would dishonour me? In introducing you into the world, I wish that world to consider you one of its brightest ornaments. I intend that you shall make a splendid establishment. I have no doubt but by my means you will do so; but then you must be ruled by me; and take my word for it, people will never trouble themselves to calculate the proportion between your appearance and means of supporting it, or think one jot the better of you for abstaining from expenses that you cannot afford to incur. Be well dressed—be beautiful, and the

world is too good-natured to inquire farther."

"But I, madam," said Rhoda, "must inquire farther; and indeed I must change greatly if I can take pleasure in ornaments for which I am unable to pay."

"You will change," said Mrs. Strictland, carelessly; "but who talked of your being unable to pay? I hope you think I am as incapable of being dishonest as if I had been born, and brought up in the pure regions of the immaculate country—that nourishing air, upon which, child, you suppose that you could have lived! Sweet ethereal creature! as if beef and mutton were not as necessary to existence at Byrhley, as in Grosvenor-square; but I do assure you, that I never thought of your not paying your debts. The being well dressed is one means of paying them: all will be ultimately paid, depend upon it. But pray, my dear, what can it signify to a person of such a pro-

perty as he will have, to whom I shall marry you, whether you carry a few untouched hundreds to him or not? If you knew the world better, you would know that many a man pays for his wife's wedding clothes, although he knows nothing of the matter."

"No man shall ever pay for mine," said Rhoda, warmly. "I should be wretched if I were to lessen the principal of what I can alone call my own."

"Oh the dear little proud heart!" said Mrs. Strictland, tapping her neck. "Well, my dear, we won't quarrel about the precise number of half crowns that this fair hand shall transfer to its future possessor; but trust to me that the bargain shall be such as neither side shall be dissatisfied with; and when you know me, and yourself better, I have no doubt but that we shall be more of a mind than we seem to be at present. Now let us proceed to this formidable inspection of your trunks; for I do assure you, I shall take care, for my own

sake, that you have something more to recommend you to the company to whom I shall introduce you, than the rags of a virtuous independence;—they would be a letter of credit that would not be readily honoured, I can tell you."

Angry, abashed, and inwardly protesting against all matrimonial machinations—making a thousand vows of constancy to Mr. Ponsonby, breathing as many regrets for all that she had left, and nourishing disapprobation against all that she met with, the humbled, but high-spirited Rhoda followed Mrs. Strictland to the very top of the house, where on opening a very small room, apparently without one single comfort belonging to it,

"This is your apartment, my dear," said the lady. "London houses, you know," added she, "do not afford the accommodation of country ones; but when you have got all your things about you, I have no doubt but that you will have every thing you want. So,

Wilson—I see you have began to unpack :—well, lay the gowns separately, that we may look them over one by one, and see what each wants."

Rhoda, as if wholly uninterested in the discussion, seated herself on one of the two chairs that the room contained, and leaning her elbow on a little table near her, remained silent, "chewing the cud of bitter fancy;" for not one morsel of sweet did her imagination at this moment furnish.

"Bless me, my dear! What's this?" exclaimed Mrs. Strictland. "Wilson, what can we do with this?"

"It is, indeed, a despair, madam," replied the well-bred and fashionably-phrased Mrs. Wilson; "for town I mean; though really it is prettily fancied, and I dare say had a beautiful effect when Miss Strictland wore it."

"The day *may come*," returned Mrs. Strictland, "when Miss Strictland may lead the fashion in town, as well as the country; but we must begin more hum-

bly---we must follow at present, and feel our way a little. My dear, I hope you have no predilection for this prettily-fancied hat?"

"I have no predilection for any thing there, madam," replied Rhoda, coldly. "Pray do what you will with all you find."

"Now I do dearly love you for your docility," returned Mrs. Strictland. "To pieces with it, then!—But, my dear, upon the whole, I find marks of very good taste; and the thing, that charmed me the most the first day I saw you, was the beautiful simplicity of your dress. It seemed not to have cost you a moment's thought, and yet must have been the result of much reflection."

Rhoda was too sad, and too indignant to reply. She sat silent, folding a piece of writing-paper, which she had accidentally in her hand, into a thousand forms.

Mrs. Strictland's whole soul was too much engrossed in the occupation she

was engaged in, to have one thought to spare on Rhoda.

"Pray," my dear," said she, "how comes it that you are still in deep mourning? Don't you know that long mournings are quite antediluvian? But, however, it may not be amiss just to shew yourself in weeds: it may seem to say, that you mourn rather as an heiress, than as a niece; and who knows what may come of such a misapprehension? Besides, a change of dress draws attention, and nothing can better suit your complexion than a little sable.—Stay, Wilson, we had better make a list of what Miss Strictland will want. To-morrow will be a busy day. We must do what can be done at home. You know that I am always economical."

"I am sure no lady can be more so," returned Mrs. Wilson, "although nobody's half so well dressed—I hear that wherever I go."

"I owe such a distinction to you, Wilson—you have admirable fingers—

you must exert your skill for Miss Strictland. Rhoda, my love, you cannot have a better assistant in all things about your dress than Wilson."

Rhoda could hardly command herself sufficiently to thank either lady or maid. She gave the writing paper another fold, and strove to dissipate the tear that arose in her eye, before it flowed down her cheek.

"But, my dear Rhoda," said Mrs. Strictland, "is this all?—Is this the whole of your wardrobe?—Are there no more trunks?"

"No, madam," returned Rhoda, "you have seen the whole."

Mrs. Wilson shrugged her shoulders.

"Well—in the country—a growing girl as you have been till now—I don't much wonder. But you will soon understand these things better. Put these gowns, Wilson, on one side; we will consider presently what to do with them; and now let us go down stairs—I—I be-

gin to grow cold.—Wilson, take care that Miss Strictland's room is set in order."

"Had I not better change my dress, before my clothes are put into the drawers, and then I will wait upon you below?" said Rhoda.

"Oh, don't trouble yourself to dress; we shall not see a soul: I am not sure that even Mr. Strictland will dine at home; but if he does, it need make no difference."

"I have always been accustomed to dress for dinner," said Rhoda.

"Oh, *pour passer le tems*—very well in the country—but you will not want employment here, and there is no good in dressing when nobody will see you. No, no; come down with me, and let the housemaid make your room comfortable."

Rhoda wondered how that would be managed, but she made no further objection to the wishes of Mrs. Strictland; and they returned to the boudoir together.

"What makes me in a kind of a little

bustle," said Mrs. Strictland, "is that we have but a very few days, in which to do a great many things; for of course you may be sure, that we are not intending to continue in town. We are merely birds of passage just now. We go down the beginning of next week to Sir Frampton Morris's.—Lady Morris is one of the sweetest women in the world, and she has always the most delightful Christmas party that can be imagined. There, my sweet friend, you will make your first *debut* into the world of fashion, and perhaps it will be there that you will strike the decisive blow.—A large party in a country house is twenty times a better place to play the game of matrimony in, than all the assemblies, and places of public resort in this great town. There is less distraction—less variety. In a private party, people go farther with one object than they design, and then are caught before they are aware—and then, you know," said she, laughing, "there is no retreat."

"Indeed, madam," said Rhoda, very gravely, "I know nothing of such things; and if nobody is caught till I lay snares, the whole sex will go free to their graves."

"Upon my word, child," said Mrs. Strictland, "you seem to have a pretty tolerable idea of the power of that face and person, and with some degree of reason, for you are very lovely—but the days of falling in love are over, my dear.—If we will catch fish, we must take off our mittens.—Charming as you are, a girl without half your attractions, will make a better establishment, except you will condescend to take a little pains."

"Establishment,"—repeated Rhoda—"take pains!"—

"Oh, you must accustom yourself to such words, I can tell you, child," returned Mrs. Strictland. "I am sure that you are no idiot; and who but an idiot can expect that a girl with a few hundred pounds, without rank or political connection, shall establish herself well, without a little pains taking on her

part?—Beauty is too common, and too cheap to do alone:—it is manner—it is skill—it is management, that makes it bring its true value.—Before you are much older, I have no doubt, but that you will be an apt scholar in all this doctrine, and easily learn all I shall attempt to teach you."

"Never!"—said Rhoda, indignantly—"I cannot—I must not"—and she thought of the rule that Mr. Wyburg had given her for her conduct.—"If such things are expected from me, I had better return into the country."

"That is not obligingly said," replied Mrs. Strictland, in a mild and gentle tone; "but I know how to allow for the narrowness of your education. Do you suppose, my dear, that I shall propose to you any thing derogatory to the dignity and delicacy of the female character? I am sure your heart disavows such a meaning, however your words might imply it;—but the fact is, that you misapprehend this matter entirely. To mak-

yourself amiable—to endeavour to please, is no more than a common deference to the rights of society—to take pains to do so, shews humility of spirit—which is a christian virtue, my dear; and those who imagine that they can please without taking pains, betray more self-confidence than, I am sure, belongs to your character. But you connect the words, 'taking pains to please,' with an undue reference to self-interest—here lies your mistake.—Be assured that I would have your end laudable; and if it be so, I am confident that you will not quarrel with the means. I will state the case—you desire to be a wife—hush, hush, no disdainings—all young women desire to be wives—it is allowable--it is praise worthy that they should do so; but a discreet, a modest young woman, suffers not her fancy to run before her prudence. She has an eye to the rank which she bears in society—an attention to the means by which that rank is to be supported. She cannot *chuse* from amongst even the very

few that would, with respect to circumstances, be suitable to her.—She must be chosen—she finds herself distinguished—but she knows, if she knows any thing of the world, that distinction is not love; that even what is called love, but seldom leads to offers of marriage, where beauty and merit are *all* the lady has to give in exchange for rank and fortune. Yet with a due, a becoming sense of her own value, she is not unaware, that if she were once a wife, she could bring more to the general stock of happiness than rank and fortune alone can bring. It is therefore not ungenerous—it is not selfish in her, so to bring to view, to *evidence*, as it were, those qualities of her mind, and those graces of person and manner, that may convince him, who she sees already likes her, that he cannot better consult the future happiness of his life, than by making her his wife. And she does all this by 'taking pains to please.' And pray what is there in so doing, from the motives which I have

laid down, that ought to revolt the most delicate—the most dignified female mind—that ought to send you back into the country; there to rusticate as the wife of some country parson, amid the cares of your pig-stye, and your dairy."

Rhoda felt herself colour violently at these words. "I dare say you may be right," returned she; "but I cannot say, that I yet understand these pains-taking doctrines. I have been used to please without taking pains; and I am afraid that I shall myself be best pleased, when such continues to be the case."

"It will not continue one hour, my dear," replied Mrs. Strictland, "in a world where you have to *make* your way—where you will be the object of envy, rather than admiration—of criticism, rather than of partiality."

"I had better return into the country," again thought Rhoda; but this time she had command enough of herself not to say so.

"My little friend," said Mrs. Strict-

land, smiling with a grace that charmed Rhoda, in spite of the angry feelings rising in her mind, "after all, I love you for these little poutings and pettings, that my worldly wisdom has excited. —Your's is the age of romance—of imagination—your vision sees things only as they ought to be; and no wonder when your looking glass reflects that face and person, you should believe that they can want no auxiliary in the art of pleasing; they ought not; but few things in this world are as they ought to be. We must accommodate ourselves to what they are, and unless we could make the men romantic, we must take care not to be so ourselves. If we have calculators to deal with, *we* must learn to calculate; but trust me, my dear, you and I will calculate *honestly*; so give me your hand, and tell me that you are friends with me."

"Dear madam, I am ashamed," said Rhoda. "I believe I was petulant—perhaps saucy."

"No, my dear, you were not either—a little too warm in a cause which you thought right,—but this is not to be wondered at. It is only the polishing hand of good company, that rubs down the sharp angles of nature. There is a sort of *covenanted assentation* in society, that preserves each individual from the pain of being contradicted, without being supposed to impeach the sincerity of any."

"How is that?" thought Rhoda—but she was not able to solve the mystery, for at the same moment a servant announced dinner.

CHAP. XV.

"Frugal only that her thrift
May feed excess."—

Cowper.

"BLESS me," said Mrs. Strictland, "how inattentive I have been!—My poor little Rhoda, how I have starved you!—I quite forgot the luncheon system of the country; and here you have not had a morsel I don't know how many hours. Do you think that you can learn to starve, as well as think with us?"—

Rhoda had had so much food for her mind since she arrived in London, that she had felt no want of that which is necessary for the body; but being thus reminded of it, she felt very glad that the next ceremony was to be dinner, and she accompanied Mrs. Strict-

land to the dining room with much satisfaction.

When, however, she cast her eyes on the table, she doubted whether it was indeed dinner to which they had been summoned.

A small morsel of fish, and a few mutton chops made the whole of the repast; and she beheld Mr. Strictland ready to take his place at the table, and his share of that which was upon it.

She had not seen him before since she entered his house; but no one, who had witnessed his reception of her, would have believed this to be their first interview.

"How do you do, Rhoda?" said he coolly: then turning to Mrs. Strictland—"we dine late to-day—I am half famished."—

"I did not know that you dined at home," returned Mrs. Strictland, carelessly; "and if you wanted any thing, you might probably have had some soup, if you had asked for it. Rhoda, my dear, shall I help you to fish? I am afraid if

you are so tremendously hungry," added she, looking at the dish of mutton chops, "that we shall have scarcely dinner enough. Pray ask the cook whether there are any more mutton chops to be had?"

The answer was returned that there were no more in the house.

"If there is any soup, desire that she will send it in," said Mr. Strictland.

The footman went out, and brought word on his return, that there was no soup.

"Well, I know that we are to have some pudding or tart, or something of that kind; and after all, there is always enough. Only Mr. Strictland frightened me with talking of being so very hungry."

"Ask whether there is any cold meat in the house," said Mr. Strictland, sulkily, to the servant.

Again the man went out on a voyage of discovery, and this time not wholly without success; for he brought with him the small remains of a leg of

mutton, which seemed to have furnished the meal of the day before.

"Oh, now we shall do famously;" said Mrs. Strictland, "pray set it here."—

"No, take it to the cook, and tell her to hash it. I cannot eat it cold," said Mr. Strictland.

"The truth is," said Mrs. Strictland, whispering Rhoda, "that the servants are on board wages. We shall be gone again so soon, that it was not worth while to begin our regular way of going on; and really I had quite forgotten that we were to have one added to our usual number."

Rhoda made no reply. The cold and repulsive manner of Mr. Strictland had much lessened her desire for eating, and the scanty fare, that was before her, gave so little encouragement to her appetite, that her portion of fish sufficed for the dinner; and Mr. Strictland observed, with something of satisfaction in his tone, "that she eat less than any body he ever saw."

"His house and his table are open to me," thought Rhoda. "If his house be no more comfortable than his table is plentiful, I shall scarcely be inclined to continue an inhabitant of it."

Yet the graces and manners of Mrs. Strictland made her some amends, and although not so much captivated with either as she had been the first day that she had seen her, she yet looked on her with admiration, and listened to her soft tones with delight.

"Pray," said Mrs. Strictland, as they sat playing with a dessert, as meagre as the dinner had been, "pray do we go to Overleigh Park, Monday or Tuesday? I have a thousand things to do, and so has Rhoda."

"On Monday," said Mr. Strictland, who seemed as sparing of his words as of his hospitality.

"You have never asked Rhoda one word concerning the Hall, and its inhabitants," said Mrs. Strictland to her husband.

"I hope they are all well there!" said he carelessly; "but indeed I know it. I had a lette from my mother two days ago."

"Well, but indeed, my dear Mr. Strictland," said the lady, with one of her most gracious smiles, "unless we make our fire-side a little more cheerful, Rhoda will run away from us. Come tell us what you have been doing?—Whom have you seen this morning?"

"Whom should I see?" returned Mr. Strictland. "You know that there is not a human creature in town.---I have been at my banker's, and that's enough to make a man thoughtful."

"I cannot imagine why," said Mrs. Strictland. "I am sure we have scarcely spent a shilling these three months. Now indeed the season for spending is coming, and spend I am resolved we will. This winter, Rhoda must see the world; and see it in its gayest colours. She must be seen herself, and seen to the best advantage; and I should think that I very ill

performed the duties which I owe to your family, if I did not take care of both these points."

"I should worse perform those duties," replied Mr. Strictland, "if I were to outrun my income; and I must say that I think very little of either seeing or being seen in the great world ought to suffice for a young lady, with the moderate provision that Rhoda has to look to."

"Oh churl," said Mrs. Strictland, "look at the dear girl. What is there, that with such a face and person, she may not pretend to? I consider her as a child of my own, and I am resolved to push her fortune as if she were."

"As far as the means are in your power, madam," returned Mr. Strictland, "you are very welcome."

"You know, Mr. Strictland," replied Mrs. Strictland, assuming a grave air, "that I never allow myself to say harsh things; but I must observe, that I should think it hard if the means, with which

I have furnished you, should be denied my use for the protection of the interests of your family.—Will you go?" added she, turning to Rhoda.

"Willingly," replied Rhoda, who had thought the last five minutes the most tedious she had ever passed.

"You see, my dear" said Mrs. Strictland, "that there is no living in this world without a little management. I cannot condescend to altercation and recrimination; they are so unlady-like. But I see no reason why I should give up my will, nor will I, when I know myself to be right. I make sacrifices enough in matters that are indifferent.—So, they have not lighted the drawing-room fire: now that's one of Mr. Strictland's economics; and you will have cause to wonder at my patience in a thousand such particulars before you have lived with us a fortnight. But come into my room—we shall be able to squeeze into it —and when Mr. Strictland sees that you really make no difference in our mode of

living, I hope he will become a more cheerful companion."

"Indeed, madam," said Rhoda, very gravely, "I seem to be so very unacceptable to Mr. Strictland, that I hope you will forgive me, if I say, that I am quite persuaded I had better return into the country."

"My dear, I will forgive you, *say* what you will," returned Mrs. Strictland. "But if ever you *think* of such a thing again, I declare open war to the end of our lives. Do I not tell you, that yielding and gentle as I seem, I never do give up a single point, which I think I ought to carry? You don't know what a heroine I can be; and ought I not to protect my sweet orphan girl? Yes, and I will protect her. Pray, why should I scruple to use my own money, to so good an end? Rhoda, my love, trust to me—love me, and we shall be the happiest companions possible. Mr. Strictland may grumble and frown—I care not; and I am sure his family owe me some in-

demnification for all the gloomy hours I have passed with him. But is there amongst them, yourself excepted, one that can indemnify me? Poor simple Sir William has not a greater variety of words than a parrot, and not quite as many ideas. And oh, the weariness of Lady Elizabeth's society! But they are very good souls, notwithstanding—let them pass. Yet do you, my dear Rhoda, remain with me---I ask it as a favour, and I think I might claim it as a right."

"Oh my dear Mrs. Strictland," said Rhoda, quite subdued; "how sweet is this! to make yourself the obliged person, when all the obligation is mine; but yet to remain in Mr. Strictland's house against his wish——"

"Pray, my dear," interrupted Mrs. Strictland, "lay aside that antiquated phraseology: this house is as much mine as Mr. Strictland's: I should consider it so, if I had not brought him a farthing. Now—but that it is undignified to say such a thing,—I wonder what kind of a

house Mr. Strictland would have had without my assistance."

"Oh, I cannot enter into such considerations," said Rhoda, with a feeling of disapprobation, which she thought half ungrateful; "but as Mr. Strictland could not calculate upon my making a part of his household, it seems to me to be something wrong to do so against his will."

"I suppose that he calculated upon your doing so, when he promised your poor doating uncle to give you a home," said Mrs. Strictland, with an air of *hauteur*, convincing Rhoda that the *covenanted assentation*, which could preserve from the pain of contradiction, had no power to enable the heart to bear it with christian meekness. "I beg we may pursue this subject no further," added she; "but I must take the liberty of intimating that I hope I am incapable of forgetting the consideration due to any one; and that when I requested the favour of your continuing with me, I had

little reason to expect, in return, a hint that I had left any part of the subject out of my calculation. This pertinacious adherence to your own opinion arises from not having kept good company; I beg that you will correct it. Nothing marks rusticity so strongly as the not knowing how gracefully to appear to be convinced."

"Ah," thought Rhoda, "how truly did my dear Frances describe the situation I am in! It will indeed call for 'reasoning,' for 'principle,' for 'self-controul.' 'The passive duty of a child must be paid,' without my feeling 'the affection of one;' I must 'then respect,' where I shall not be able to 'feel reverence;' 'I must yield my will,' while I cannot but 'keep my opinions.' Oh, why, why must I continue in such a situation? But Mr. Wyburg has told me that I must guard against that 'too quick resentment of pain and pleasure, of benefit and injury, which marks my character;' that 'the regulation of my

heart and my temper,' must make the whole of my praise' or 'my condemnation;' and, where, oh, where shall I be so often called upon to put on this guard? Where will the necessity of this regulation so often occur as in this house? Oh, may I become very good, for I am sure that I shall be very miserable!"

Lost in these thoughts, Rhoda sat silent, with her eyes intently fixed upon the fire.

"My dear Rhoda," said Mrs. Strictland, with perfect graciousness,---"why so grave? Why do you mistake the gentle hint of friendship for the note of reprehension? There are little conveniences of *société*, that can only be learnt in society: it is no reproach to you that you have them to learn; and with me, you know, my dear, you must be sincerity itself: we must have but one soul between us, and then how happy we shall be. So now smile, or look grave if you please, for I must consult you on a very important subject; let us

look over this list of your wants, and arrange how we shall supply them—to-night for thought, to-morrow for action. Stay, I will ring for Wilson, she will greatly assist us."

"May I ask the favour of you, madam," said Rhoda, "to do all that you think proper to be done, without troubling yourself to refer to me? I feel myself at present very ignorant upon this subject, and I am sure if I mix in your debates, I shall rather puzzle than assist the cause."

"You speak like a little Solomon, or the Queen of Sheba herself, my dear," said Mrs. Strictland, "and it shall be as you desire; but you will soon learn to think on such matters yourself. I am sure you have naturally a good taste; I think, I could not love you so well if I doubted it, for good taste is the combination of every thing that is lovely in the heart and understanding."

"Well, but my dear Mrs. Strictland," said Rhoda, "pray be so kind as to keep

in mind the the smallness of my means---I *must* not run into debt."

"Oh, the absolute *must*," said Mrs. Strictland, laughing.—"Debt! What makes you so dreadfully afraid of debt? Again I say, trust to me and my principles: you shall contract no debts, but what you will be very well able to pay in the long run; and tradespeople like to give long credit,—it authorizes them to charge higher prices."

Rhoda was again about to transgress, by disputing the wisdom of this argument for running into debt, but she had already began to feel the necessity of disguising, when she could not ohange her opinions, and she said to herself, "I can keep my principles, though I yield my will,—this first excess cannot be great: when I act for myself, I can be as guarded and as moderate as I please."

"Thus taking credit for a prudence that *was* to be exercised, Rhoda resigned the deliberation of the present hour to the taste of Mrs: Wilson, and the prin-

ciples of Mrs. Strictland, and withdrawing her attention and her thoughts wholly from a consultation, the very terms of which were to her a foreign tongue, her spirit flew back to Byrhley, and there mingling itself with that of her beloved Frances, she forgot, for the present hour, that she had ever quitted its peaceful shades.

She was recalled to her actual situation, by Mrs. Strictland dismissing Wilson, with,

"It will all do very well—I think we have not forgotten any thing—send coffee. And now, my dear Rhoda, you and I must rise with the lark to-morrow. If we really do leave town on Monday, I am sure we have not a moment to lose. I am quite astonished to see how many things you want, that are absolute necessaries."

"I have resigned myself on this occasion, my dear madam, into your hands," said Rhoda. "But in future I hope you will a little allow me to regulate."

"Again!" said Mrs. Strictland, interrupting her, "pray let us have no more of that cuckoo note, or reserve it for Mr. Strictland, child; he will adore you. I protest, I think I shall advise him to make you *maîtresse d'hotel*, provided that I am exempt from your jurisdiction. But hush, here he comes. These are not subjects to be discussed in his hearing."

Coffee and Mr. Strictland appeared together, and the evening passed with a heaviness that made Rhoda think it would never have an end.

This weariness of the passing hour was a new sensation to Rhoda; she had hitherto never known it; and she wondered how it could be felt in the company of a person, who, the first time that she had seen her, had given wings to every moment. But Mrs. Strictland displaying all her graces, insinuating the most delicate flattery, and anticipating pleasures, which Rhoda's fervid imagination painted in the most glowing colours; and Mrs. Strictland, wrapt up in a morning dress,

indolently turning over things, on which she did not look long enough to know what they were designed to represent; or with a pencil making a memorandum, or a calculation, seeming almost to forget that Rhoda was in the room, were two very distinct personages, and Rhoda began to wonder how with identity of person, manners could be so different.

She longed impatiently to retire to her own room, that she might write to Frances, to whom she felt that she had so much to communicate, and by whom alone she seemed to be connected with the rest of her species. But bed seemed to be as little thought of as amusement, and the clock had struck twelve before Rhoda, in perfect despair of such a thought or warning to any body else, ventured to ask, "is it not late?"

"I dare say that you think it so," replied Mrs. Strictland, smiling. "If you wish to retire, pray ring. I hope you will find every thing that you can want in your room."

"I dare say I shall," said Rhoda, and taking a candle from the servant, proceeded with alacrity to the garret.

But what a damp struck her heart, when she found it without fire—without any appearance of attention to her wants, or of the personal attendance to which she had been accustomed! She looked around with the intention to ring the bell, but she saw that there was no bell to ring—she threw herself into a chair, and burst into tears.

Ashamed of her weakness, she started up, unlocked her writing-drawer, and throwing a cloak around her shoulders, poured out the whole of her heart to the only human being, who, she believed, could sympathize in her feelings.

"Is it possible, my dearest, my almost only friend, that eight and forty hours should not be completely passed since we parted? Can such a point of time have been sufficient to have conveyed me to a region so contrary to the one I have hitherto inhabited? The flowery

plains of Arcady, and the eternal snows of Zembla, do not differ more, than do Byrhley and Grosvenor-square."

"All here, so cold—so black—so inhospitable. I am really ashamed to tell you how I am shivering at this moment; how much I feel the absence of every thing that looks like comfort. I am still more ashamed to confess how my weak eyes, and my weaker mind were dazzled by a splendour, which I find now to be only tinsel. I am not *now* quite so sure that you would love Mrs. Strictland, as I once was, but I am quite sure that I shall never love her, no, nor any thing here. Do not let my dear Mr. Wyburg exclaim that I am wrong. This is not an improper resentment, I can but too well discriminate. I can but too plainly see that profession is not generosity, nor even hospitality; and that extravagance, and parsimony, may be equally selfish. But of all this, more at leisure.

"I must return to you, my dear Frances

—I must return immediately—be not astonished when we meet, and we shall meet before the week is passed—I will explain every thing. I am sure that even your dear father, forbearing, passive, and unresenting as he is, will say that I ought not to stay here; and will not another friend of ours rejoice to have me once more safe under the protecting groves of Byrhley? He is little aware how his interests are undermining. Say what you will, my Frances, it is not here that I can be trained to that rare excellence, of which you once drew so animated a picture. Oh! if I could realize your vision, what should I care for all the goods and toys of life? Whisper not, however, such a thought even to the winds, I charge you, lest they should waft it towards Oxford. I will not unsought be won, and I will be convinced that I am beloved, as scarcely ever woman was loved, before I give even a suspicion that I can love in return. Don't call this coquetry—it is dignity—necessary

"But I have no fire," said Rhoda. "Dear madam, would you have a fire? My lady never dreamt that you would wish for a fire: she thinks it is the worst thing in the world for the complexion."

"I have always been used to a fire," said Rhoda.

"Oh! then to be sure—another day,"—said Wilson, "but perhaps, as it is so late, and Mrs. Strictland breakfasts early, because of shopping—perhaps you would dispense with a fire this morning?"

"I really would rather have a fire," said Rhoda; "I was quite starved last night."

"Why how unlucky this is," returned Wilson. "My lady never dreaming that any young lady would like a fire in such a small room, and being quite sure, ma'am, that you had not been used to it, because it is so unwholesome, you know, ma'am, ordered the chimney to be bricked up when she left town the last time, and I am afraid that it would be quite impossible to have a fire to-day. But, ma'am, if you please to speak to Mrs. Strictland,

I am sure she will send for the workmen, and all may be set to rights again in a twinkling."

Rhoda finding the evil to be without remedy, made no other answer, than "that she would rise instantly;" and then resumed the train of thought, which sleep had interrupted the night before, for certainly the bricking up of the chimney had not weakened her resolution of returning to the land of fires, comforts, and attendance.

CHAP. XVI.

> "The adorning thee with so much art
> Is but a barbarous skill:
> 'Tis like the poisoning of a dart,
> Too apt before to kill."—
>
> *Cowley.*

WITH these hostile intentions Rhoda repaired to the breakfast room, but her resentment was disarmed almost as soon as she beheld Mrs. Strictland.

She found her already dressed, and with an elegance that set off all her charms; her countenance easy and affectionate; and as she gave her the morning salutation, she said,

"You are quite lovely this morning, my dear; but, poor little soul, Wilson tells me that you have been always accustomed to a fire, and I fear you have found it uncomfortable to be without

one; but I do assure you that it is much more conducive to those roses which so adorn your cheeks, than sleeping in a hot room would be. However, if you can put up with the inconvenience for a few days, every thing shall be remedied on our return to town, for you have only to say what you wish, and if it is in my power, you shall have it"

Was it possible that Rhoda should say, that she wished to leave so sweet a companion, so kind a friend? She blushed that she had ever entertained such a thought.

"It is true," thought she, "too quick a resentment of pain and pleasure, of benefit and injury, *does* mark my character. I will correct it—I will not send my letter to Frances—I should be ashamed to let Mr. Wyburg see how little I have benefited by his admonition."

"What makes you look so meditatingly, love?" said Mrs. Strictland. "I hope you had pleasant dreams last night; and see how they are fulfilled. Mr. Strict-

land begs you will accept of this, in aid of those additions to your wardrobe, which your change of situation makes necessary."

"Mr. Strictland is very good, Madam," said Rhoda; "but——"

"Come, no scruples," interrupted Mrs. Strictland: "I see that soft bosom covers a proud heart; but from so near a relation there can be no necessity for such a feeling. I can assure you that I was very glad to take him in the humour; for I believe that your economical notions had begun to affect *me;* and I was half terrified with the calculation of the sum that mere necessaries would oblige you to lay out."

The truth was that Mrs. Strictland had wrung from the unwilling hands of Mr. Strictland the twenty pounds, for the money was no more, that she thus presented to Rhoda as his free gift.—To be well dressed was, with Mrs. Strictland, the first of moral duties; and she was mistress of an infinite quantity

of sophistry to prove it to be so; and she could not have endured to have had a young person, whom she was to introduce into the world, less distinguished for the elegance and refinement of her dress, than for her beauty and good breeding.

She knew also that every favour, which was conferred on Rhoda, would redound to her own credit; and having once taken it into her fancy that the introducing Rhoda into the world would contribute to her vast consequence there, and at the same time furnish a most honourable pretence for indulging her taste for magnificence and pleasure, she pursued the idea with all the eagerness attendant on a new-born passion; and she could not have experienced a more sensible mortification than the return of Rhoda into the country would have been. But, as Rhoda's mind upon all these points was not in perfect unison with Mrs. Strictland's, she replied—

"Indeed, madam, if I were to take

this kind present of Mr. Strictland's, in aid, as you say, of the present occasion, yet, if *mere* necessaries are to be so very expensive, how am I to provide for the future? Had we not better stop at the first step? You know how very limited——"

"My dear, I do not pretend to any very nice skill in calculation," said Mrs. Strictland; "but I know that if it is not your own fault, you may be mistress of thousands, before your few poor hundreds are expended; and I also know that it is nothing but just, right, and fitting that the descendants of a common grandfather should appear in the world upon an equal footing. Mr. Strictland cannot consult his own dignity better than in promoting yours; and therefore, I beg, my love, that we may have done with this eternal subject, which would really quite weary me, if any thing from you could weary me."

"Well, my dear madam," said Rhoda.

"I don't like any thing that begins with a solemn *well*," interrupted Mrs.

Strictland, playfully: "pray dispatch your breakfast; I have ordered the carriage at eleven, and I expect it every moment."

"How amiable, after all, is Mrs. Strictland!" thought Rhoda;—"and what a booby I was, to be out of humour because I had not a fire in my room! How glad I am that my letter to Frances is not gone; I must have appeared quite a fool in the eyes of my reasonable and well-judging friends."

The two ladies, having finished their breakfast together in perfect good humour with each other, sallied forth upon the important business which they had in hand; and Rhoda soon found her senses bewildered with the profusion of elegance and splendor that was submitted to her choice; but while she thought that the prices, which were named for each particular, precluded her from making any purchase, she heard Mrs. Strictland exclaim at every exhibition,

"How reasonable!—what a bargain!

I always say that this is the cheapest shop in town, without any take-in pretension to it."

Rhoda was astonished at the readiness with which Mrs. Strictland made her selection, and the celerity with which she gave her orders.—A glance of the eye sufficed to decide her choice, where Rhoda thought that there was such an equality of perfection as to baffle all preference; and no other consideration but what she liked best, seemed to make any part of the question.—In her appeals to Rhoda, she so completely overpowered her faculties by a flow of commendatory terms, that she found it impossible to form an opinion; and she so dazzled her eyes with the rapid succession of silks, muslins, and laces, that Rhoda had not a distinct notion of any one thing she saw.

But when she beheld the quantity of all that was laid apart from what Mrs. Strictland had chosen for herself, with the injunction that all those must be charg-

ed to Miss Strictland, Rhoda absolutely started, and almost trembled.

"My dear madam," said she, "I cannot want such a profusion."

"Hush," said Mrs. Strictland, putting her finger on her lip, with a look that seemed to warn Rhoda not to disgrace herself by betraying her former simplicity of attire, and made her blush.

"You see, sir, that I have brought you a very good customer," said she to the shopman; "you must use us well; you must let us have every thing as cheap as possible;—and above all, pray let every thing be sent home directly. We are going out of town in a few days, and have no time to lose."

The man bowed and promised,—and away drove the ladies;—the one to make more purchases, and the other to wonder that half of those already made could be necessary.

Notwithstanding the dispatch, with which Mrs. Strictland performed her business, the whole of a long morning was

occupied in driving from shop to shop, and in giving directions to different work-people; and Rhoda returned jaded in spirits and in body, cold and hungry, while Mrs. Strictland seemed to have respired new life from what she had been about, and to have laid in a new stock of good humour and gaiety, that would not allow her to think of any unsatisfied wants. She had an actual pleasure in laying out money in dress, whether for herself or others, that seemed, while she exercised her taste upon the subject, to absorb every other inclination of the mind.—She flew with renewed eagerness to open the various parcels which were arrived, and, summoning Wilson, made the usual demand upon the obsequious waiting-maid, for that proportion of flattery and approbation, which was accustomed to follow all she did.

She was not, however, in this case, such a churl as to require all; Rhoda had her full share,—and as this beautiful young creature beheld her lovely form

adorning the graceful drapery of the most shining silk, or saw it enwrapt in the most transparent muslin, and her delicate complexion shaded by the finest lace, let not poor human nature be too hardly thought of, if her heart beat reponsive to the praises lavished upon her at once by the lady and the servant;—or if she too hastily adopted their conclusion, "that it would be a thousand pities if Miss Strictland was ever to be worse dressed."

The "gauds and toys of life," were not, I fear, at this moment quite so indifferent to Rhoda, as when she was shivering in her little uncomfortable chamber; and there might possibly be other patterns of excellence that she was as ambitious of copying, as that which the right-minded and right-hearted Frances had commended to her imitation.

The bustle of preparation, the flutter of a new-born vanity, now made Rhoda indifferent to every other circumstance.

The scanty dinner, the gloomy brow of Mr. Strictland, now passed unobserv-

ed by her. She thanked him for his present of the morning with a grace and a frankness, which shewed to Mrs. Strictland that she had already begun to appreciate the pleasures that affluence could bestow, and she no longer apprehended the repetition of "that cuckoo note" which had before so wounded her ear. The past and the future were certainly at this moment absent from the mind of Rhoda, and she "started like a guilty thing," when Mrs. Strictland exclaimed,

"Bless me, I must seal my letters! That's the last bell!"

"And I have not written to Frances!" cried Rhoda, in a tone of bitter self-reproach.

"You will have no time now, child," said Mrs. Strictland.

"Oh, but I must, I will—I would rather die than not write to-night,"—said Rhoda.

The good-natured footman said, "that he would take care the letter went, if she could write it that moment."

"Oh, yes, yes!"—said Rhoda,—"I have but a word to say."

She penned the following lines in an instant.

"I have been so engaged all day, that I have but one moment in which to tell my dearest friends that I am well, that I am happy—that I love them dearly—that I shall always love them.—Write to me instantly—direct to Overleigh Park, Oxfordshire—from whence you shall hear more than I have now time to tell you.—Oh, dear Byrhley, and its still dearer inhabitants!—farewell!"——

The having written these hurried and disjointed lines, by no means reconciled Rhoda to herself for the temporary forgetfulness of her best friends, into which she had been betrayed; and it was not until she had so far re-collected her thoughts as to discover, that though she had been obliged to defer the pleasure of hearing from Frances until her arrival

at Overleigh Park, she might herself make a much earlier communication of all she had felt and thought since they parted, that she could be sufficiently at peace with herself to resume the consultation with Mrs. Strictland, which the postman's bell had interrupted. Having, however, satisfied her conscience for passed transgression, by a resolution not to sleep that night until she had repaired the fault, she returned with fresh relish to the discussion of gowns and caps—ribbons and laces.

It was, notwithstanding, merely the novelty of the subject, and the stimulus of vanity, that with Rhoda gave such a topic any attraction; and Mrs. Strictland continued to talk with increasing vivacity and interest, when Rhoda had already begun to yawn, and to find that she had not one more word to say, either in praise or dispraise of the heaps of frippery which lay before her.

Mrs. Strictland, observing her languor, said, "my dear, how shall we ever re-

concile you to our house? It will never do if you are to fall asleep at ten o'clock."

"Oh, don't be alarmed,"—replied Rhoda,—"a small portion of sleep has been accustomed to suffice me; and it will soon make no difference at what time in the twenty-four hours it is taken;—but we have been so long talking of muslins and silks!—I am sure I am much obliged to you for all the consideration that you have had upon the subject, for you must be extremely tired."

"It is tiresome enough, to be sure,"—returned Mrs. Strictland;—"but I make it a rule not to forbear doing what ought to be done, because it is tiresome. To be well dressed is a duty that we owe to society; and it is not possible to be well dressed without bestowing a great deal of thought upon the matter. You may see that, by the strange incongruities with which one is shocked every day. Never believe that you can think too much of your dress, provided the result makes it appear that you have

not thought at all.—Art, that is discovered, loses its effect."

Rhoda looked in Mrs. Strictland's face, to see if she were to laugh at this moral dissertation on dress; or, whether she was to receive it as one of the mysteries of the Bona Dea.—She saw no symptoms of levity in Mrs. Strictland's features, and therefore composing her own, she contented herself with a simple assent to the last proposition.

"That is very true,"—said she, and looked around to see, if amongst the variety of ornaments, with which the little boudoir was crowded, there was any thing like a book.

Attracted by the glittering backs of some volumes, which stood entrenched behind a double row of various pieces of beautiful china, she attempted, with all due care, to take one of them down, when Mrs. Strictland called out,

"Pray, my dear, don't touch those books—their whole value is in their binding. I had them bound in that beautiful

manner wholly for the sake of effect—the gold shews off the china so well.—I did not care what the contents were, as I never meant that they should be removed from their place.—I cannot bear to have my furniture pulled about and deranged;—if you wish to read, you will find some new publications on that pier-table.—By the bye, we should look them over, and see what it will be necessary to know:—there is always some book of the day, of which it is very aukward not to be able to give an opinion. You must of course be a little at a loss in such matters;—if you will be kind enough to bring the books here, I will shew you what it will be the best for you to look into.—There is no occasion to read the whole—a quick eye, and a sharp wit, will enable you to catch enough at a glance to serve the purposes of conversation. No fear of detection, for you will not find one person in a hundred that has read ten lines together in any book, except a novel, on which they deliver

the most confident opinion;—and a *bon mot*, or the shrug of the shoulders from a pretty woman, is of a thousand times more value than the best criticism that ever was made."

"But can there be any pleasure," said Rhoda, "in turning over the leaves of a book, without giving one's self time to understand its contents?"

"Oh, I am not talking of the *pleasure* of reading, my dear," replied Mrs. Strictland,—"that, I apprehend, is tasted by very few; and I am sure there is no time, if we live in the world, to read half the books that it is necessary to talk of;—but, thank heaven! there is a royal road to every thing now:—and what with abstracts—and extracts—and compendiums, and the beauties of this author, and the essence of that, we can talk as fluently on all literary subjects, with as little expenditure of time, and no expense of thought, as if we had put out our eyes, and deadened our complexion by hours of midnight study."

"I assure you," returned Rhoda, "I have no predilection for midnight study —but the simply understanding what I read, when I do read, must, I think, be pleasant, and could not be injurious either to the eyes or the complexion."

"Oh, pray read all you can," said Mrs. Strictland;—"the more the better— there is a rage just now for well-informed females;—but who can command time? and when you come to live in the world, you will find that if you will be any body there, you had better know a little of every thing, than only one or two things well.—Who would be able to appreciate your merit in the latter case? In the former you would pass, with most people, for a prodigy of information and talent."

"But this living only to what others think of us," said Rhoda, "without approving ourselves either to our understanding or our heart, must it not be 'flat, stale, and unprofitable'?"

"If we please others," replied Mrs. Strictland, "I think that we ought to be

satisfied with ourselves. I am sure it is our first duty, as social beings, to render ourselves acceptable to society."

"But does not this in some degree depend upon how the society is composed?" said Rhoda.

"I don't understand such nice distinctions," said Mrs. Strictland. "I never enter into reasonings; it is not the way. Nobody likes to be asked questions. We must take society as we find it, and make ourselves as agreeable to it as we can."

Rhoda was silent; but her thoughts flew back to Byrhley, with a desire once more to partake of its conversations.

"*There*," thought she, "the first end of clothing is warmth and decency—of reading, instruction and amusement: *here*, the effect that they will have upon others, rather than ourselves, is the principal object in view."

CHAP. XVII.

"She sighed for pleasure while she shrunk from wrong."

Crabbe.

With her mind full of all the novelties in morals, which she had met with, Rhoda retired to her little garret, and had already lost, in thoughts of more interest, those which had so much disturbed her the evening before. Her present care was wholly, how to expiate the crime of heedless ingratitude which she felt that she had committed.

The impulse of the moment was self-accusation, and frank confession; she obeyed its dictates.

"How soon, my dearest Frances, have I found my safety and virtue dependant upon the protecting hand, and warning voice of yourself, and your revered fa-

ther! What a versatile, what a circumstance-governed animal is your Rhoda! Yet I would fain think that it is not my heart which is to blame, turned round and round as it seems to have been by every breath of pain or pleasure that has assailed it in the last three days. What would you think of the hasty, the almost unintelligible lines which I wrote to you a few hours ago? I, to have been too busy to write to my best friend; but that was not my first writing. I inclose *that* first, for I am resolved you shall have the whole of my follies before you; and yet I once thought that you should never have seen this proof of my hasty petulance; and was not such a design a worse fault than this very petulance?

"How contemptible to have been put out of humour with the want of a few accommodations; and yet, to confess the whole truth, I suspect that it was my pride, rather than my effeminacy that took the alarm, for I think that I

do not much care for the downy parts of life, but I thought myself neglected. "And what then?" I know that my good Mr. Wyburg will say. Ah, my dear sir, I dare not tell you *what then*. But indeed I will strive to be more what I ought to be; and I am not without a certain kind of discipline that may well assist my good intentions. Yet you will not easily believe how relieved I felt, when I had written that silly letter; and how well pleased I was with my resolution to run away from some of my nearest relations, and kindly professing friends, because I had no fire in my room, no bell to ring, and nobody came near me to assist in disrobing my august personage. Really, my dear Frances, this favourite Rhoda of yours is but a simpleton—a simpleton in her resentment, still more, perhaps, a simpleton in her motives for her conciliation. Over night, my dear, I was quite sure that I should never love Mrs. Strictland; I went to her breakfast table, with the

hostile intention of parting, to meet no more; of parting, because my dignity was offended. And was it my good sense, was it my christian charity, which reconciled me to my fellow creature, and retained me in the situation, that he, to whom I owe all duty, had appointed me? No such matter; but I found Mrs. Strictland beautifully attired, looking like an angel, smiling with gaiety and affection. I heard her pour forth the most flattering sounds, the warmest professions of regard, of attention to my minutest wishes; found her ready to load me with more favours than I was willing to accept, and absolutely forcing upon me a present from Mr. Strictland, which would have made me fine for twelve months at Byrhley, but which will go very little way in providing what are called mere necessaries here. What could I do? I am afraid that I hardly asked myself the question. I was passive, and before I knew where I was, or what was become of my resolution of

leaving London immediately, I found myself involved in such a chaos of silks and muslins, of laces and ribbons, as dazzled my fancy, and confounded my understanding.

"The business of the morning was to dress me. You have no comprehension what is implied by the word *dress*, in these sublimated regions,—to make me *fit to appear* as one of a large party of the rich and the fashionable who are to be assembled at Sir Frampton Morris's, during the christmas holidays.

"Mrs. Strictland's kindness, or—— no, my dear, I will not write the alternative;—Mrs. Strictland's kindness, let us say, thought nothing too fine, nothing too costly for *her* triend, for *her* companion. All my scruples were silenced by, 'my dear, would you wish to disgrace *me*?' and sometimes by a little appeal to my vanity or my cowardice, which durst now avow how little I had been accustomed to such habiliments; but I cannot

recollect that she summoned one of my virtues as her auxiliary.

"You would be astonished to see, and I am ashamed to think, to what a magnitude such arguments swelled the sum total of necessaries. I do not mean to repeat such follies, and that they have been once committed is not to be imputed wholly to having been over-ruled. I could not oppose my ignorance to Mrs. Strictland's experience—and if I could, do you think that I ought to have refused to take her direction, as to what was necessary at my first appearance in *her* world; but which I am sure, if she has not over-calculated *necessaries*, neither can, nor ought to be mine. It is a world that I have already experienced will sometimes make me very sick, and at all times very poor. 'So many extraordinary essentials!—Maxims so new,—to me so unintelligible. What will my dear Mr. Wyburg say to the social duty of being always well dressed, to

the obligation to talk of books that we have not read? But his candour will not give credit to such absurdities.

"Well, my dear, and thus went the morning, and if the morning only had so gone, I should not have had so much to reproach myself with, for my heart had yet taken no share in the business —scarcely had my fancy—but that odious Wilson!—that flattering Mrs. Strictland. Yes, my dear, between them both, they turned the foolish head of your friend. And then to write you word that I had been too much engaged to find a moment in which to address you! No, I was not too much engaged; I was too heartless; yes, my dear, heartless. What an inconsistent thing is human nature! Perhaps I should rather say *my* nature, for I do not remember ever remarking such incongruities in you. You ever keep on the even tenor of your perfect way. How is this? Your father says, it is not in place, in circumstance; that it is in

the heart—in the temper.—Oh! my Frances, what a formidable responsibility is laid upon us!—and the worst of the matter is, that those frivolities have their seductions---that it is possible to like what we despise---to wish to retain what we feel to be of no use---and be humble enough, even in the full tide of our pride and our vanity, to take distinction from *that*, which is no part of ourselves.

"You tremble for me, but be of good courage: surely I cannot lose myself in a path, of the intricacies of which I am so well aware. But should it prove that my mind is too meanly gifted, to 'make its own place,' will not Mr. Wyburg allow me to seek safety, if I must not aspire to virtue, from circumstances? Shall we consult the Oxford scholar on this point? No, no. Nor *yet* must he suppose that he has an interest in it, and to speak honestly, I do not know that he has. My views of happiness change

every moment---the summer cloud is not more variable.

> " St. James's Countess now, in ermined pride
> And now Pastora by a fountain side."

" Adieu, my dearest friend. Whatever else I am, I shall ever be truly your affectionate

RHODA."

Rhoda having thus played with her remorse, until she had lost it, shook hands kindly with her self-love, and suffered her thoughts once more to fall into that stream of vanity, which had so lately borne her away from all her better feelings.

The remaining days in town were passed in all the bustle of preparation, and all the anticipation of undefined pleasure; which leaves the mind, the youthful mind especially, no power of reflection.

The common subject, and the common solicitude that existed between Mrs. Strictland and Rhoda, made them

equally interesting to each other, and equally forgetful of Mr. Strictland.

Rhoda no longer felt her spirits depressed by his perpetual silence, nor her feelings wounded by being an inmate in the house of a man, to whom she was conscious she was unwelcome. It was not that if she had thought at all, she would have been indifferent to these points; but at this period of time, she had no leisure to attend to them. Mr. Strictland never brought himself into notice by any traits of gaiety or kindness, and in totally forgetting him, Rhoda only followed the example of Mrs. Strictland, without seeming to remember that there was in the world such a person as her husband. She pursued the career of expensive arrangements, both with respect to the present occasion, and in her plans for the future when she was to return to London, as though she had not, by the most solemn engagement, referred her will and action to the decision of one, whom she knew to be decidedly hostile to every thing she did, or proposed to do.

This deliberate rebellion was, however, conducted with the most perfect good breeding; the contumacy appearing neither in the words or the voice. All was gentle—all was lady-like. To remonstrance was opposed playfulness; or at least returned by a gentle hint that the duty of a wife was best shewn by consulting the dignity of the husband. Mr. Strictland, taciturn and sullen, seldom pushed his opposition beyond a low grumbling, or a few disobliging or sarcastic words. He knew that while he held the purse-strings, he could at any time interpose his vote; and as he hated trouble, he wished not to waste his strength in skirmishing, while he knew himself sure of victory, whenever he chose to bring the issue of dispute to a pitched battle.

CHAP. XVIII.

"Is this a dinner, this a genial room?
No, 'tis a Temple, and a Hecatomb."—

Pope.

The important Monday morning at length arrived. Mrs. Strictland attended the toilette of Rhoda, in order to be assured that all, which had been prepared with so much care, was worn with equal elegance.

"I have always found," said she, with an air of as deep reflection as her features would take, "that the morning and the travelling habits, are the most difficult parts of the female dress; nothing in either should appear to be *recherché*; yet each admits of those happy touches of genius, that go more directly to the heart than the most perfect work of art alone. Lady Morris will appreciate your whole

character by the impression that your first appearance gives her. I do not know a more intelligent person than Lady Morris. —Yes, yes—that is quite right, Wilson.—Oh, my dear Rhoda, I could kiss you for the flow of that feather—I could not have done it better myself. My little friend, you must have studied those things more than you are willing to own."

"It was merely accident," replied Rhoda, half piqued and half disgusted by such solemn emptiness.

"Oh, yes, the accident of walking gracefully, from having learnt to dance. I cannot for the life of me determine which is likely to have the best effect, on the first *coup d'œil*, that you should be wrapt up in those beautiful furs which we bought on Saturday, and which the weather will justify; or whether with the privilege of youth, you should discover more of the beauty of your complexion, and the contour of your head and neck."

"Oh, pray let that matter be determin-

ed by my own feelings," said Rhoda, laughing. "I do assure you that I should think the being starved would be paying a high price for even Lady Morris's approbation."

"I am sure that I should *not*," returned Mrs. Strictland, firmly. "You don't know, my dear, how much she has it in her power to give you fashion, although I scarcely know how she got it herself either; but perhaps we had best leave the fur, or no fur, to be decided at the moment:—a graceful carelessness — a something between being closely wrapt up, as if you imbecilely dreaded the weather, and a robust, rustic braving of it, may be best suited to your age and rank in life. I, for my part, shall take the opportunity of putting my lovely green shawl upon duty. Lady Morris would give any money for such a one, but luckily, hitherto, there has not been such another to be got."

These, and other such important matters being settled, the two ladies de-

scended to breakfast, where they found the taciturn Mr. Strictland waiting for them.

"You have made very tedious toilettes," said he sulkily.

"But the time has not been thrown away, I think," said Mrs. Strictland, exultingly. "Look at Rhoda. I was resolved, if possible, that she should strike at first sight. Lady Morris will bless me for such an auxiliary to the attractions of Overleigh Park, and we shall come upon her with all the advantages of surprise; for I have not hinted a word of what kind of personage my little friend is, only called her a relation of yours, who had lived all her days in the country; and I saw by the answer, civil as it was, which she made to my annunciation, that I had given her a shiver; but when she casts her eyes on Rhoda, it will be exchanged for a glow of pleasure."

"Really, my dear," said Mr. Strictland, peevishly, "if you talk at this rate, you will fill the girl's head with such vain

notions, as will make her quite intolerable."

"Oh, no," returned Rhoda, smiling, "there is no fear of that, while I can make a distinction between the fashion of my gown, and my own merit."

"The fashion of your gown *is* your own merit," replied Mrs. Strictland, "it shews your taste."

"Pray let us have done with figurative taste," said Mr. Strictland, "and attend to that which is real. It is time that we were off. and you have not began to eat your breakfast."

The meal was, however, soon dispatched. The carriage came to the door; all the packages were adjusted, and the departure was compleated.

The party arrived late at Overleigh Park. The company in the house had finished their morning amusements, and were generally retired to their respective apartments. Lady Morris was alone when her guests arrived.

"My dear Mrs. Strictland!"

"My dear Lady Morris! pray give me leave to present Miss Strictland to you. I hope that she will approve herself worthy of the society at Overleigh Park."

"Miss Strictland," said Lady Morris, with a look of surprise and pleasure, "will do honour to our society. I never saw," added she, in a lower voice to Mrs. Strictland, "so lovely a creature."

"She is a mere rustic," replied Mrs. Strictland. "I bespeak at once your indulgence and advice for her."

"Oh, she will want none of my advice," said Lady Morris; "she will turn heads fast enough without it. Will you have any refreshment, or do you prefer going directly to your rooms? It is late, perhaps you would like to be quite quiet before you begin to dress?"

The latter alternative was accepted. "Let me then shew you where you are to sleep," said Lady Morris. "I think we had best go this way, it is the shortest; and all the gentlemen, I dare say, have left the billiard room."

She opened the door, and found, not perhaps wholly contrary to her expectation, that this was not the case.

"Never mind," said she. "Mrs. Strictland, here are some of your friends, they will rejoice to see you."

"But one is so stupid, after having been shut up so many hours in a carriage," replied Mrs. Strictland.

"Well, only let them make you their compliments, and we will pass on."

And so she did, with a look of triumph cast on Rhoda, as if she had said, "see what an acquisition I have made!"

And indeed the whole occupation of Lady Morris's intellect, and the single business of her life, was to acquire means to make her house, whether in London or the country, the distinguished resort of all that motley crowd of high and low, of rich and poor—of vice and virtue, which forms the heterogeneous mass, denominated "the fashionable world!"

In a purpose so worthy, Sir Frampton concurred heartily with his lady; and

fortune had smiled so graciously on their united and laudable efforts, that it was agreed on all hands, that nobody gave such excellent dinners as Sir Frampton Morris!—Nobody's parties in town were to be compared with those of Lady Morris! To be seen at Lady Morris's assembly, could not be called a distinction, because every body, "of a certain set," was to be found there—yet *not* to be there, was such a mark of not belonging to that "certain set," as few people, who could avoid it, had courage enough to incur; and hence it was, that Lady Morris's superiors in every circumstance which forms the ranks of life, and in every quality that distinguishes the moral and intellectual creature, bowed low at the shrine which her vanity had erected, and sought from her hand that distinction, which they ought themselves to have disdained to have given her.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Strictland," said Lady Morris, as they stood together by the fire, in Mrs. Strictland's dressing

room; "I ought to make you an apology for telling you to come to us this week. We are yet very dull; I hope, indeed, that we shall improve every day, but at present, we have scarcely a soul in the house. We shall only dine sixteen to-day, and we have never mustered a dozen before; nor are those we have of the very choicest sort."

"Is Lady Randolf here?" said Mrs. Strictland. "I thought I saw Lord Randolf in the billiard-room."

"Oh, yes," said Lady Morris, with a little shrug of the shoulders, and one hand held up; "she is as indivisible from our Christmas party, as the boar's head, or the goose pye; and nearly as amusing as either. But you know that she is not obtrusive, and interferes with nobody. And there is also Lady Renkin, and her two daughters."

"Lady Renkin!" exclaimed Mrs. Strictland. "Oh yes, my dear; I know what you mean. It is true, she is the greatest of bores, and as ugly as sin,

and as ill dressed as death; but she has been distracted, these two years, to be of some of my parties—and you know her connections;—she pays her price. Besides, her daughters have a certain fashion about them: one meets them in very good places, I assure you. The eldest plays at billiards remarkably well, and a good female billiard-player helps the attractions of the billiard-room mightily—the youngest really excels on the harp; and you know Lord William doats on the harp."

"Lord William St. Quintin!" said Mrs. Strictland, eagerly. "Is he here?"

"No, but he comes to-morrow; and to speak the truth, I was quite in despair for a novelty to his taste. His delicate fastidiousness makes it the most difficult thing in the world, year after year, to find attractions that can detain him for two days; and you know that he is the very soul of society: but had I seen Miss Strictland, I might have spared my fears. Beauty, and rare beauty too,

will go farther with Lord William, than even the harp."

"Yes," said Mrs. Strictland; "but I hope Rhoda will understand that Lord William is no marrying man."

"Oh no, no, every body knows *that*," said Lady Morris, gravely; "but his *imprimatur* gives value to the book."

"But you have told us only of ladies," said Mrs. Strictland; "have you no beaux?"

"You have seen two or three," replied Lady Morris; "but I have not much to say for any of them—mere younger brothers. I tell you, however, that we shall improve to-morrow."

Mrs. Strictland made a little short cough, as if the sharp air had affected her lungs; and then said, with a careless tone,

"Will Sir James Osbourne be here this year?"

"Without a doubt; and I hope to-morrow," replied Lady Morris.

"Do you think he is ever likely to marry?" said Mrs. Strictland.

"Ever, my dear!—That's an extensive word; but I don't think he has any designs of the sort at present. When a man has got to the wrong side of forty, he has so accustomed himself to do without a wife, that he is not very likely to care whether he marries or not; and the deuce of it is, that men have then got so much experience, that it is the most difficult thing in the world to catch them at such an age. Twenty years hence, indeed, the next succession of beauties may have a chance; for then, perhaps, Sir James may want a nurse, and an heir to his estate, and may think it good management to provide for both by the same means; but at present I really think that Sir James must be quite a despair to the young ladies."

"I am sure I know nobody that cares whether he is or not," said Mrs. Strictland.

"Oh certainly not, except poor Lady Belmont," replied Lady Morris;—"but

now I have chatted away all your time. Good bye. Don't hurry yourself in dressing. You know that we care much more for the accommodation of our guests than the reputation of our dinners."

And away she went.

Rhoda had been a silent auditor of the above brilliant conversation, but not an unobserving one.

"Pray who is Lady Randolf?" said she to Mrs. Strictland.

"Oh, my dear, a most miraculous woman—a woman of beauty, rank, sense, and accomplishments; who never made a *grande passion* in her life, and whose power is scarcely known beyond the circle of her own immediate family."

"How comes she to be admitted to the honour of making one in Lady Morris's parties?" asked Rhoda, sarcastically.

"Oh, she is Sir Frampton's sister."

Rhoda started, and felt a glow of honest indignation, which it was a pity

should have evaporated in the business of the toilette, to which she was now immediately summoned.

On entering the drawing-room, where the whole party was assembled, the eyes of Rhoda easily distinguished Lady Randolf from every other female She was a very lovely woman, of three or four and thirty, in whose composed and benevolent countenance goodness was written in the most legible characters.

The easy susceptibility of Rhoda's self-love instantly declared itself in her favour, from the graciousness with which Lady Morris's introduction of her to Lady Randolf was received; and not the less so, from the contrast which the same ceremony, performed towards Lady Renkin, displayed.

The latter was a little scraggy, dark-complexioned woman, between forty and fifty—gaudily and *openly* dressed, to the very height of all that made the fashion of the hour; with no expression of countenance, but what was given by ill-

nature or envy. A hasty glance, cast from Rhoda towards her two daughters, explained very intelligibly the repulsive air with which, after making the *dis*-courteous courtesy of introduction, she turned from the former towards Lady Randolf, continuing with a sycophant tone a wearisome intreaty, which this call upon her good breeding had interrupted.

"But why, now, may we not have the pleasure of seeing Miss Randolf at this time of the day?—She is such a love!—and one never gets a sight of her. Why will you not let her come down stairs?"

"I am really sorry," said Lady Randolf, "to refuse so much obliging solicitation; but Louisa is always particularly engaged at this hour."

"Engaged!—Why she has lessons all day long. I am sure she has, though I know nothing about it; and then it is so improving to be in good company—and she is such a love!"

"Your ladyship is very obliging,"

was all the reply that Lady Randolf made.

"Well, but if Miss Randolf is so busy," resumed the unrebuffed importuner, "why may we not see the other little cherub?—Children do so sweetly while away the five or ten minutes before dinner, and they look so pretty when they are nicely dressed, and so proud, and so pleased, with their little necklaces and bracelets!—it's quite a comedy. One should think them women already—Oh they are little sensible things. Why may not Miss Matilda come and amuse us?"

"Because," said Lady Randolf, smiling, "I hope Miss Matilda is in bed."

"*Ah la pauvre petite!*—What, is she in penance?—Oh the poor little thing!"

"Your ladyship forgets the hour," returned Lady Randolf. "I assure you the penance to Matilda would be to keep her up, not to put her to bed."

The announcing of dinner put an end to Lady Renkin's daily discourse on

this point, which she regularly uttered, nearly in the same words, from perfect vacuity of thought, and from being absolutely unable to imagine any other thing to say to Lady Randolf, whom she considered merely as a wife and a mother, and very much out of her place in good company.

Lady Randolf bore the persecution and contempt from whence it sprung, with the most stoical patience; and in this instance revenged herself only by an arch smile of affectionate intelligence, which she gave Lord Randolf, as she passed towards the dinner room.

If Rhoda had been surprised by the spare meal at Mr. Strictland's, she was not less so by the variety and profusion that was displayed on the table of Sir Frampton Morris; while the order and arrangement with which the succession of dishes was placed and replaced, almost as if by the magic hand of fairyism, the dead silence with which the whole proceeding was carried on, no

voice being raised above a whisper, and a company of sixteen people reduced into eight *tête-à-têtes*, gave her more the notion of a religious ceremony, and even of a sacrifice, than of the convivial board, and the pleasures of society.

The companion, however, which fortune had allotted Rhoda, was not wanting, in an under voice, in his endeavours to draw her into such conversation as his wit could furnish; but Rhoda could not always hear what he said, and still less frequently understood the slang in which it was uttered. The sound of her own voice would also have terrified her, and she therefore contented herself with bows and smiles, and with the acceptance of all that was offered her. Her companion was hence not wholly unjustifiable in concluding that he was throwing away his eloquence upon one, who either could not hear, or would not speak, and in this belief, he ceased his efforts to amuse her.

The conclusion of the dinner seemed,

however, to break the charm of silence. On the appearance of the dessert, the statues became living creatures, and Rhoda began once again to believe that general conversation was not forbidden amongst a number of people, who professed to be drawn together by the pleasure of conversing with each other.

Of the speakers, the volubility of Lady Renkin particularly struck Rhoda, as she seemed to utter words in proportion as she wanted ideas. Lady Morris and Mrs. Strictland, she observed, still continued to converse with their respective neighbours in whispers; and the Misses Renkin, though somewhat more audible, were chiefly heard in little short laughs, or by the tone of voice that might easily alarm a too sensitive self-love, with the apprehension, that the utmost, conveyed by it, was of no very charitable a nature. But what most surprised Rhoda was the talkativeness of Mr. Strictland. He, whom she had not heard utter an hundred words, since she first

entered his house, now seemed the mouth of the company; but he spoke with so much solemn importance, and with so authoritative an air, as prevented all regret for his want of domestic communicativeness.

Rhoda was so much engaged by her observations on the scene before her, that she was unconscious of the little part which she took in what was going forward; and she had drawn the notice of the whole company upon her, by her unbroken silence, before she adverted to the fact of not having uttered a single word since she had sat down to dinner.

It could not be believed, with a countenance so intelligent as was Rhoda's, that her silence proceeded from not having any thing to say; and although her fashionable neighbours had given her up as "a poor thing," who had never been in good company before, the good-natured Lord Randolf, who sat opposite to her, was resolved to assist in putting her at her ease with a set of people, who;

he saw, began to look down upon her, and to every one of whom, he shrewdly suspected that she was superior.

He did this with so polite a freedom, as although it did not conceal his design from the penetration of Rhoda, rendered her easy under it, and enabled her to reply to his questions, and to bear her part in the conversation into which he led her, with so much advantage to herself, as at once to turn the stream of general opinion in her favour, and to persuade Rhoda herself, that Lord Randolf was as good and as pleasing as his beautiful wife.

CHAP. XIX.

"Oh Father Abraham, what these christians are!"

Shakspeare.

The favourable opinion, that Rhoda had conceived of Lord and Lady Randolf, was confirmed through every successive hour of the evening, and broke forth in a warm eulogium upon both, the moment that she found herself alone with Mrs. Strictland.

"Yes, they are mighty good people, I believe," replied she, with a yawn; "but dismally dull. Lady Randolf never knows any thing that happens out of her own family, and Lord Randolf never said a *picquant* word in his life. Indeed, I never saw so melancholy a set collected at Overleigh Park before; and

if it were not for the reinforcements that Lady Morris has promised us, I should be tempted to run away from them all. Those odious Renkins!—they are my aversion. I cannot conceive what advantage Lady Morris can propose from admitting them into her society; but if she *has* a fault, it is being a little too refined in her politics, and so, I think, she will find here. It is impossible that they should be to Lord William's taste; and when *I* have been here, it has never appeared that he wanted any inducement to prolong his stay, even beyond a reasonable time. Lady Morris might have trusted to her own attractions, and the charms of her general society."

"Pray what makes Lord William so very important?" asked Rhoda.

"Because he is the most agreeable person in the world—the most fashionable—the least come-at-able—the arbiter in all matters of taste; his distinction gives fashion—beauty—wit."

"And does he possess all these him-

self? Or is he like the old hags in fairy tales, who, hideous and poor themselves, shower down beauty and riches, and all manner of good things on those who are happy enough to be their favourites?"

"Hideous and poor indeed!" repeated Mrs. Strictland. "You may judge for yourself, to-morrow: but I doubt whether he will be to your taste; for I do assure you, that he does not at all resemble Lord Randolf. He is not, indeed, a young lady's man; and I am not sure that unmarried beauty, even such as yours, my dear Rhoda, can have any attraction for Lord William St. Quintin."

"And how," asked Rhoda, "dare he show that he is an admirer of married beauty?"

"Oh, my dear Rhoda," replied Mrs. Strictland, "we won't talk of such things. There are many merely arrangements of society, that might startle those who are so little acquainted with it as yourself; but I caution you to keep your

charity, and not to imagine that the attentions of Lord William can mean any thing but to show his own knowledge of good breeding, and of the world. He is a man of nice honour, and particularly careful not to injure the prospects of any young person, by indulging himself in distinctions, which he knows will come to nothing."

A second glow of honest indignation warmed the breast of Rhoda; and she retired, in order to give vent to it, in a letter to Frances.

On entering the apartment, however, she was startled by the lateness of the hour, indicated by a beautiful clock, which stood upon one of the tables, while the brilliant light reflected from a bright fire, and the wax lights which illuminated the room, shewed the luxurious and magnificent furniture with which it was fitted up, to so much advantage, that Rhoda was insensibly led to examine it, piece by piece, till the moments stole insensibly away, and she lost all in-

clination to pursue any train of thought, but the dreams of worldly splendor, with which such a display of its constituent parts had filled her mind. Drowsiness succeeded, and the letter to Frances was deferred to another moment.

She awoke to fresh incitements to vanity, from the elegance and refinement with which the assiduous cares of Mrs. Wilson had adorned her morning dress.— Elegance and refinement so much beyond any to which she had before been accustomed, and which she could not but admit, heightened the effect of her beauty. She contemplated herself for a moment in the magnificent glass which reflected her beautiful person, from head to foot, with a look of complacency, that did not escape the penetration of her wily attendant.

"My lady, ma'am, begs that you will just step into the dressing-room, before you go down, that she may see all is right; but, indeed, ma'am, she may trust you, for I never saw so young a

lady, who had so good a taste—but then every thing so becomes you!—every thing falls so *pat* about you!"

Rhoda frowned, and turned away from the glass, angry with Wilson, but more angry with herself.

Rhoda found the breakfast-table a much more sociable meal than the dinner had proved, as well as much more agreeable to herself.

Lord Randolf placed himself by her, and conversed with so much good-humoured ease, as soon to make her forget the newness of their acquaintance; and the sprightly good sense, with which she maintained her share in the conversation, increased so much the circle of her auditors, that Lady Renkin's brow blackened with envy, and Mrs. Strictland's brightened with triumph

"Were I your ladyship," said Lady Renkin to Lady Randolf, "I protest I should be jealous."

"What, of my little rustic!" said Mrs. Strictland. "The accomplishments

of Miss Renkins are much more formidable. Miss Louisa plays divinely: I never heard such sounds as she drew from the harp last night."

"I really thought yesterday," said Lady Renkin, "that Miss Strictland was dumb."

"Your ladyship's good nature," said Mrs. Strictland, "will allow for a little *mauvaise honte* in so young a creature. Rhoda has not had the advantage of so many seasons in town, as your daughters."

"Miss Strictland, however," said Lady Randolf, "does not look like a dumb person."

"Dumb!---Oh dear, no," said Lady Renkin. "I am sure I shall never accuse her of being dumb again. The gentlemen seem to think that nobody can speak but herself."

Mrs. Strictland laughed maliciously. "Your ladyship is so amusing!" said she, with a tone of the most perfect good breeding.

"Lady Morris, I believe breakfast is

over," said Lady Renkin. "Shall we go?—This fire is so scorching."

"Oh, with all my heart," said Lady Morris, who, otherwise engaged, had heard nothing of what had passed.

"Any thing to break up the congress at the bottom of the table," thought Mrs. Strictland; "but, poor woman, her mortifications are but begun."

"Pray," said Lady Renkin, laying fast hold of Lady Randolf's arm, and falling behind the rest of the company, "can your ladyship tell me what fortune Miss Strictland has? Did you ever see any girl so expensively dressed? I am sure my poor girls can afford no such extravagance; and I should suppose—but your ladyship knows one hates to talk of such things."

"I really know nothing of the matter," replied Lady Randolf. "Miss Strictland is uncommonly lovely, and must make all, who can see her, wish her every good; and I dare say, that your ladyship may make yourself perfectly easy, for

fortune seems to have been as kind to her as nature."

"What an intolerable simpleton is that Lady Randolf!" said Lady Renkin, turning from her, and whispering her eldest daughter. "She never understands a word one says."

Rhoda had not hitherto exchanged a single word with either of the Misses Renkin, nor had received from them the slightest civility. They had determined that "she should not be one of them;" and they had persuaded themselves that, by excluding her from all their parties, they should get beyond the region of her dangerous influence; but they now began to fear that, wherever she was, there would the gentlemen be also, and that, if they separated themselves from her, it would be they, not she, who would be "the poor forlorns."

"Miss Strictland, do you play billiards?" said Miss Renkin to Rhoda. "Shall you and I have a game before the

usurping lords of the creation take possession of the table?"

"I do not play billiards, I thank you, madam," said Rhoda.

"Besides, I lay my finger on Miss Strictland, this morning," said Lady Morris. "I must do myself the honour to make her quite at home.—Here is a lovely sun—and if you have no objection, I will shew you the warmest and pleasantest walks which our pleasure-grounds afford: we shall have time before the carriages come round. Mrs. Strictland, will not you accompany us? We have made some improvements since you were here last, that I flatter myself you will approve."

"I was resolved to have you to myself," said Lady Morris, as she carried off Mrs. Strictland and Rhoda, "if it were only to mortify those detestable Renkins. I know what passes in their shabby hearts, as well as if I was shut up in the narrow confines; but they

shan't succeed—they shan't ever have the honour of patronizing the merit, that they would delight to depreciate."

"Would not Lady Randolf have walked with us?" said Rhoda.

"Oh no, my dear," returned Lady Morris; "she enacts *la gouvernante* all morning. We never think of her in any party of walking, driving, or riding. It is all loss of time, according to her—she has always something else to do, and holds herself as accountable for her hours, as if her daily bread depended upon the employment of them. Well, this is the alteration that I was to shew you, my dear Mrs. Strictland. Do you miss nothing that used to be a blemish?"

"Here!" said Mrs. Strictland. "Did not that parsonage, so *mal placé,* stand here? How could you contrive to get rid of it?"

"We have done better than get rid of it," said Lady Morris; "we have made it the most beautiful menagerie that taste and circumstance combined ever

created, and given it, as you see, all the advantage of perfect concealment, so that I dare say you might have passed the entrance, and never have guessed to what a *bijou* it would have led you."

"And have you made Mrs. Parson, Madame de Maintenon like, the keeper of your turkies?"

"Oh you profane creature!" said Lady Morris. "No;---the luckiest thing in the world happened. In full strength and health the parson died. I am sure that I never expected such a thing, and very sorry I was for his family, of course, for there were five or six little children. I did every thing for them that I could think of; and Sir Frampton put about a subscription—but, would you believe it?---Lady Randolf would not give a six-pence. I suppose because mine was the first thought. I think they say that she has taken one or two of the children; but what then?---It was so ill-bred not to subscribe, when she knew that I made a point of a good sub-

scription. Well, you may be sure that we were in a terrible fidget, as to who would succeed; and we had once a compleat fright, for it was said that Mr.—Mr.——I cannot think of his name—but one of your 'best men in the world,' who would take such care of us all. Oh we were frightened out of our wits, for we wanted no such care; but fortunately my Lord B—— had a certain friend to oblige—that is, there were certain arrangements to be made. Having something to give, you know he might ask, and so the living was given to the Dean of ——, and then residence was out of the question. I never was so glad in my life: then the next point was, who should be the curate? But this was soon settled. Lord B—— is the most gentlemanly person in the world: he said that nobody could have so much concern as to who was the curate as Sir Frampton, and he therefore made it a condition with the dean, that he should have the nomination: so all difficulties were

over, and a young man, who has another curacy about ten miles off, does the duty, and looks after the people, and very well too, I dare say---and it was a very good thing for the young man; and then the dean was very glad to let the parsonage-house to Sir Frampton, and so to work we went, and soon shut it up, as you see;---and I have the most delightful poultry-woman! Oh I will shew you all her contrivances!---But it is not what we have acquired, but what we have got rid of, that makes the delight of the change. There is nothing in the world that is such an *embarras* to me, as a respectable clergyman's family. I never know where to class them: one is so afraid of failing in respect to the cloth, you know; and they are so good!---and so wise!---and so dull!---and then they are such heterogeneous creatures---fulfilling all their domestic duties, as they are called, and being ladies and *literati* into the bargain! Oh, I can never make you believe what a relief it was to have

done with every thing of the sort, and what preferable company I think, old Sarah and her chickens."

It is not easy to describe the confusion of thought and feeling with which Rhoda listened to this harangue. All that she had ever loved—all that she had thought admirable and respectable—all that in her best moments of reflection and feeling, she looked forward to, as the happiness and honour of her future life, to be thus treated with contempt—to be made the objects of sarcasm!—Were there, indeed, two opinions upon such points?—Were virtues, acquirements, talents, when unaccompanied by fortune, fashion, or station, no safeguards from the shafts of ridicule? It is true that her good sense despised the ridiculer, but her vanity was wounded by the ridicule. She knew that she ought to live only to her conscience; but she had hoped that the praise even of the worldling might follow a strict adherence to its rule.—Must she be at once a saint and a mar-

tyr? She thought Lady Morris silly and disagreeable; but she could not be content to be one of those non-descripts, which that wise lady knew not where to class. She could scarcely bear that her dearest friend should be so considered; and if she were to marry Mr. Ponsonby, would she indeed become a less desirable companion to a woman of fashion and elegance, than old Sarah and her chickens? She was mortified—she was angry;—she wished to assert the dignity of virtue and intellect wherever they were to be found, but she feared to betray the personal interest that she took in their defence, and she remained silent. She thought the exhibition of the menagerie intolerably long—the morning cold. She longed to return to the house, but more that she might get rid of her present companions, than from any pleasure she expected there. Who was there, indeed, within her reach, that could give her pleasure?

At length all the chicken-pens were

shewn—all the contrivances expatiated upon; the skill of Watson extolled, and her ladyship's superior taste insinuated, with an "I believe I may take credit to myself for this. Mr. Watson insists upon it, that it was my idea: he says that he takes as many hints from me, as he gives; but you know those people can afford a little flattery. I am sure that Watson ought; for what do you think these alterations cost Sir Frampton? I can never persuade myself to tell you. He might have built a church at less cost, and have been canonized into the bargain; but I am afraid I am so mundane that I prefer my little poultry-court to saintship."

"And well you may," replied Mrs. Strictland; "for I never saw such a jewel of a place."

"My dear Miss Strictland," said Lady Morris, "what's the matter? You have not given one opinion either of my chicken-house, or my chickens. Are

you relapsed into one of your silent fits? Pray don't let these Renkins have such an advantage over you: out-talk them, as well as out-look them, or I will never forgive you."

As she said this, they reached the house, and found the door crowded with carriages and horses.

"Oh, I see that the carriages are come; and now we must determine what to do with the rest of the morning. Do you ride, my dear?" said she, turning to Rhoda.

"Certainly," said Mrs. Strictland, before Rhoda could reply: "she does every thing that every body else does."

"That's the way to be agreeable," said Lady Morris. "Well, then, you shall ride."

"Thank you, madam," said Rhoda; "but I hope you will excuse me. I have a letter to write."

"No, no," said Mrs. Strictland; "you are very good; but I will not trouble

you to write that letter to-day—to-morrow will do as well. I would not have you lose your ride on any account."

Rhoda stared;—nor could she imagine of what letter Mrs. Strictland spoke.

"The letter that I was going to write them"——

"Yes, I know all about it, my dear," interrupted Mrs. Strictland. "I know what you were so kind as to be going to say; but I assure you, that it will do quite as well to-morrow—so run up stairs and change your dress. You will not detain the party five minutes, I am sure."

"What can this mean?" thought Rhoda, as she turned to obey Mrs. Strictland. "There was no letter that I was to write for Mrs. Strictland. She did not know that I intended to write to Frances. What can this mean?"

When Wilson answered the summons of the bell, she brought with her that, which put all other thoughts to flight;

for she brought with her a letter from this very Frances.

"This letter has been here these two days, ma'am," said Wilson; "but Mr. Thompson did not find out till this morning, that you were Miss Strictland, ma'am."

Rhoda took the letter with the greatest impatience.

"Oh it is impossible to ride now!" said she. "Pray go down, Wilson, and desire one of the footmen to tell Lady Morris—"

"That's my lady's bell," cried Mrs. Wilson.

"Oh then, pray desire that Mrs. Strictland will be so good as to make my apologies to Lady Morris; for really I cannot ride now,"—and she turned eagerly to the perusal of her letter.

"What can you mean by the message that you have just sent me?" said Mrs. Strictland, entering a moment afterwards, with much displeasure in her looks.

"Only, madam, that I have just got a letter which I must read, and that I must answer; and therefore I cannot ride."

"I never heard any thing so missish," said Mrs. Strictland. "I must just intimate, my dear, that if you live with me, I shall be obliged to you to do what I wish. You know, my love, that I cannot say harsh things; but, really I love you too well to give up any point which my better knowledge of the world makes me know to be important to your interest. You are not aware how perfectly polished and assenting you ought to be in such a society as this. I blushed for your impoliteness, just now, and had it scarcely in my power to cover it—so pertinacious you were. I can assure you, that it was a marked favour in Lady Morris to propose you should ride the first morning. I have known her leave half the misses in the house, to find their own amusement for weeks together, and never trouble herself about

them; but she has taken a fancy to you—and then to talk of having letters to write!—What letters of importance can young ladies have to write? I took the matter upon myself; but I really shall be obliged to you, another time, not to make me look like a fool, as if I did not know what I said."

"I was not aware, madam," said Rhoda, coldly, "that when you did me the honour to admit me into your house, I was to have no will of my own."

"Now, my dear," said Mrs. Strictland, "that is one of your strange misconstructions upon what is really the best kindness I can shew you. How should you know your way in this strange land, into which you are cast, unless I point it out? I may be a little warm, though I hope not unbecomingly so, because I love you, and am as much interested in your establishment as if you were my daughter; but what has that to do with your having no will of your own? I shall never wish to contract your will;

but I must interfere to restrain its appearing, whenever the laws of well-bred society, or your own interests, make its doing so improper.—Wilson, assist Miss Strictland. She is waited for below."

Rhoda had before seen reason to believe that the suavity of Mrs. Strictland's manners did not extend to her temper, and that the controul, which she had over her words, was not the controul of meekness; but she had yet to learn, how entirely external was each of those charms, which had so wholly captivated her warm imagination, and easy heart, the first day of their acquaintance. She was yet to learn that the whole of her moral was comprised in the word "*convenance.*"

I would not have been indebted to a foreign tongue for a term, could I have found an equivalent in the English language. It was not civility, for that means setting every body at their ease; it was not good-nature, for that partakes

of the pleasure which is felt by others; it was not benevolence, for she thought only of herself. No, it was, for I cannot express it otherwise—it was "*convenance*"—the substitution of a mode for a virtue; and she made it serve for every occasion.

Rhoda, unable to resist, without a sturdiness of opposition, alike foreign to her temper, and to her natural good-breeding, endeavoured to subdue both her disappointment and her displeasure.

"Pray, my dear madam, say no more about the matter," said she, as she locked up Frances's unread letter in her writing box; and then arranging herself with all the expedition in her power, she hastened down stairs, offering up, however, her fervent vows to liberty—and more truly in love with Mr. Ponsonby than she had ever been in her life.

END OF VOL. I.

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